

NUMBER SEVEN QUEER STREET



MARGERY LAWREN

Miss Margery Lawrence's gifts as a writer are many-sided, and as a change from novel-writing pure and simple she has more than once before the publication of this collection of stories, taken a most successful plunge into the realms of the strange and the uncanny. NUMBER SEVEN QUEER STREET is a group of seven stories taken from the casebook of Dr. Miles Pennoyer—fictional brother to Algernon Blackwood's "John Silence"—a doctor who caters for psychic rather than bodily ills.

"The Case of the Bronze Door," "The Case of the Young Man with the Scar," the eerie story of "The Moon-child"—if you are interested in the macabre and supernatural (and who is not?) you cannot fail to be enthralled by these extraordinary tales of mystery and imagination; Miss Lawrence herself has considerable practical knowledge of occultism—as set forth in her previous book "Ferry over Jordan"—and this knowledge adds an air of unusual conviction to a fascinating book.

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Also by Margery Lawrence
NUMBER SEVEN

NUMBER SEVEN QUEER STREET

By
MARGERY LAWRENCE

Being Some Stories taken from
private notebook of
Pennoyer. Recorded by his
occasional assistant JEROME



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NUMBER SEVEN QUEER STREET

By

MARGERY LAWRENCE

*Being Some Stories taken from the
private casebook of DR. MILES
PENNOYER. Recorded by his friend &
occasional assistant JEROME LATIMER*



ROBERT HALE LIMITED
18 BEDFORD SQUARE, W.C.1

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DEDICATED
WITH THE AUTHOR'S RESPECTFUL GOOD WISHES
TO THOSE AMONG HER READERS
WHO
LOVE AN OCCASIONAL DIVE
INTO THE MACABRE!



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
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FOREWORD

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He left no address, and for years I heard nothing of him. I practised law for a while, but my heart was never in it. I used to spend my spare time scribbling verses, stories, and plays, and one day a novel. This I ventured to send to a publisher, who, to my blank astonishment, not only approved it, but offered me a contract for three volumes. I was this I promptly and joyfully accepted, and the legal profession and the headhunting of many of my friends, devoted myself entirely to writing, and thus I have never made the income of my Edgar Wallace or a P. G. Wodehouse. I was, however, becoming sufficiently well known to be assured of a regular supply of bread, not to say butter, so I went on it, and even a little fun at times. And I was told that upon the shelves of a small collection of ghost-stories that I had again from the publisher, telling me that he had read the book and

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FOREWORD

"No. 7 Queer Street" is the address of a very remarkable man. "Queer Street" was originally Queen Street, but soon nicknamed "Queer Street" for reasons that will become plain to readers of this book of stories. It is an odd little backwater down Blackfriars way, and Number Seven is an old house that stands at a corner, fronting on one side the River Thames and its shipping—a Muirhead Bone etching by day, a flaming Turner or a misty Whistler study at night—and on the other a sleepy little square containing gardens open to the public. Here I have often strolled with Pennoyer on a summer's evening, or sat talking on one of the battered wooden benches under the tall plane trees, sooty with London smuts but loud with the singing of the birds whom nothing, not even the blitzing of London in the Great War, seems to daunt.

Pennoyer and I first met when we were undergraduates at Oxford together. He was several years my elder, but we had similar tastes, both being rather "solitaries" by nature and preferring good talk, books, music or a game of chess to the usual outdoor or amorous sports that appeal to the young male! So we spent much of our time together both then and later, and the friendship lasted until, under pressure from my family, who wanted to see me in a nice "safe" job, I went into a solicitor's office, and Pennoyer, who had early shown a tendency to concentrate on strange and abstruse studies, vanished Eastwards in search of the special training he needed for the work he was ultimately to make his own.

He left no address, and for years I heard nothing of him. I practised law for a little, but my heart was never in it. I used to spend my spare time scribbling verses, essays, stories and plays, and at last a novel. This I ventured to send to a publisher, who, to my blank astonishment, not only accepted it, but offered me a contract for three others! Upon this I promptly and joyfully abandoned the legal profession and, despite the headshakings of many of my friends, devoted myself entirely to writing; and though I have never made the income of an Edgar Wallace or a P. G. Wodehouse, I nevertheless became sufficiently well known to be assured of a regular supply of bread, not to say butter to spread on it, and even a little jam at times. And it was following upon the success of a small collection of ghost-stories that I heard again from Pennoyer, telling me that he had read the book and

was much interested to see I had "not outgrown my early keenness on the strange and curious", as he put it, that he had now taken up permanent quarters in London, and that he would very much like to see me again. That was how I first came to visit "No. 7 Queer Street"—and to realize how well-named was my friend's abode. Our reunion was a real delight to both of us, and thereafter we met frequently and I had every chance of studying his work, which was that of a "psychic doctor"—one who deals in ills that beset the soul rather than the body of man—and to hear of some of his adventures, incredible, horrible, fantastic and amazing in turn. And herein in this book are set down, with his permission, seven of the most interesting of those adventures.

In one or two of them I had a personal hand—for soon after we met, Pennoyer offered to give me the training necessary to act, if need be, as his assistant in these matters. He was nice enough to say that he had known even as a boy that I possessed the psychic sensitiveness necessary to that training . . . he even said that I had acted as his pupil and assistant in his magical work more than once in certain earlier lives that we had spent together, and that therefore the training would be easy in this life. All he would have to do, he declared, would be to revive my old knowledge, which still lay hidden in my consciousness—no knowledge or power is ever really lost. It only "goes under" for a time, and needs bringing up to the surface of one's conscious brain. . . .

Certainly he was right in that I seemed to absorb his training with amazing speed! So I think I can lay claim to being the right person for recording these adventures—which, I assure my readers, however strange and amazing they sound, are none the less founded upon fact!

There are not many people who are fortunate enough to know these selfless and splendid people, the psychic doctors—and there are still fewer books that record the wonders they can do and are still doing. Algernon Blackwood's book *John Silence* was one of the first, and Dion Fortune's book *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner* is another—alas! both these books are now difficult to get, thanks to the *Salvage Drive* which has swept so many books out of existence long before their value or interest was exhausted. But they are both such fine books that they are well worth seeking for . . . and I hope that this account of some of the work of their colleague, who herein appears under the name of "Miles Pennoyer", will be found not altogether unworthy to stand beside them.

JEROME LATIMER.

1

THE CASE OF THE BRONZE DOOR

IT WAS A MAGNIFICENT THING, and I exclaimed with wonder and admiration when I first saw it, one night when I went to dine with my old friend Miles Pennoyer at his roomy flat overlooking the Thames.

He had turned the top floor of an old riverside house in Blackfriars—the famous “No. 7 Queer Street”, of which I spoke in my foreword—into an enviable bachelor flat. Certainly it was lonely and out of the way according to most people’s tastes—below him were offices, bleak and empty every night, and but for Friedl, his old Bavarian housekeeper, and Hans his wolfhound, he lived there entirely alone; but he preferred it—indeed, declared it necessary. High-perched there above the river, with the tall house below him silent and deserted, he could breathe freely, he said. It was either that or going to live in the country, since for his work he was forced to avoid, as far as possible, living in too close contact with the crowd. So this delightful top-floor eyrie was perfect for his requirements.

It was a lovely spring evening, and the wide windows behind the window-seat stood open. I flumped down upon the brown velvet cushions and leaned luxuriously back. The sunlight lay along the old polished boards of the floor, warming the faded colours of a gorgeous Persian silk rug that lay before the fireplace into life and vitality. Below, a whistle hooted faintly in midstream, and the masts of the shipping rose heavenwards like a serried row of pointing fingers; there was a light, warm breeze, and across the river, beyond the tumbled roofs, the sky curved sweetly, faintly blue and flecked with tiny tufts of cloud like feathers.

Pennoyer poured me out a whisky and soda, and I stared contentedly round the room—and saw the screen.

It stood at one end of the long, low-roofed room, fastened flat against the wall. It fitted curiously well into the background of mingled old and new that was Miles Pennoyer’s setting; dark brown velvet hangings, deep leather chairs well worn and cushioned, rows of books running round three sides of the room to a height of some four feet from the ground—and all about, oddments of ancient art of any and every kind. A Russian ikon

of silver gilt set with gleaming rough-cut jewels, a Venetian mirror over the mantelpiece, a Byzantine Madonna, glowing in sombre colours from a cracked wooden panel. A slipware tyg, two Ming kylins, blue as the heart of turquoise, a Turkish scimitar with a carved and enamelled hilt, the rust of old blood still upon it—and now, set flat against the end wall, the screen!

I jumped up at once and went over to examine it more closely.

"That's a magnificent piece of work, that screen. Where did you pick it up, you lucky devil?" I said.

Pennoyer smiled and splashed iced water plentifully into his glass. He drank no alcohol, as became a man interested in his particular sort of work—for Miles Pennoyer, though most people called him Doctor, was not a doctor in the strictest sense of the word. Not a doctor, that is, of the body. His doctoring lay in a direction much more difficult and intangible. A woman once called him a "doctor of souls", and perhaps this description may pass as well as any other, though to me it savours rather irritatingly of conventional religion—which, since I am a rabid anti-clerical, always rubs me up the wrong way! But to resume . . .

I flattened my nose against the screen in envy and admiration. It was not, I discovered, actually a screen at all, but a door of bronze weathered with age to a green-brown sheen exquisitely rich. A great double door, seven foot high by about six wide, fastening in the middle with a giant wheel-shaped sort of lock, and with huge hinges shaped like Mah-jongg pieces on each side. It was covered with a magnificent design in incised and chiselled work, and I guessed its date as somewhere about the Sung dynasty; its dignity and elegance, combined as only the Chinese know how to combine them, was as satisfying as a perfect meal, as the kiss of a woman who understands kissing, as a book one reads and reads again and loves afresh at every reading. I sighed, and turning my back on the thing, came to the fire where Pennoyer waited for me, his deep-set eyes intent on my face.

"Where did you get it?" I asked discontentedly. "You've got some priceless stuff, I know, but that's simply magnificent!"

He nodded.

"It was given me," he said. "Quite recently. By—a patient, since I suppose I've got to call those I try to help 'patients' for want of a better word."

He drank a deep draught of iced water and set his glass down as I sat up, instantly alert.

"You've got a story about the thing, Pen!" I accused him.

He laughed and nodded.

"Yes! And since I think it's one worth putting on record, I may as well admit that one of the reasons for which I asked you round to-night was in order to tell you the story."

I settled back luxuriously.

"Good thing you didn't tell me so before dinner," I said, lighting one of the good cigars Pennoyer keeps for his guests—as he drinks no alcohol, so he neither smokes nor eats meat, since to do any of these impairs the delicacy of the psychic vibrations on which so much of his success as a "doctor" depends. "I would have gulped it down so fast that I would never have done justice to Friedl's cooking! Go on now—I'm all attention."

It happened (said Pennoyer) about three or four months ago. I was dining at the Club one night—the "Travellers" I mean, where I'm regarded as one of the few members who doesn't quite conform to standard and is therefore vaguely suspect! (His lean dark face creased into amused wrinkles.) They tolerate me because my Uncle Benbow is a peer of the realm, and therefore the argument is that if I *am* superficially queer, at heart I must be sound! I go there sometimes, as you know, because after dealing all day with strange twists and tangles of the human soul, it soothes me to sit awhile and relax—bask, if you like—in the atmosphere of a place where practically everybody, including the staff servants, is beautifully and restfully—even monotonously!—normal.

Well, I was sitting eating my usual "mess of rabbit-food", as dear old Uncle Benbow calls it—being a vegetarian and a non-drinker-or-smoker is another nail in my coffin with the diehards!—when old General Satterthwaite tottered up, puffing and blowing. He slumped into a chair beside me, and at the moment I was rather annoyed, I must admit, because I wanted to be left alone. I wanted—mentally—to snooze, as I was frightfully tired.

But the General's a friend of Uncle Benbow's, and one has to be polite—and after a preliminary of grunts and snorts, the old boy suddenly came out with something rather interesting.

"You go in for this—spiritualistic business, don't you?"

The utter scorn and contempt he put into the word "spiritualistic" was delightful! I stared at him, but made no answer—frankly, I couldn't imagine what he was getting at.

He snorted again, louder than before.

"Don't believe in it—all damn rot! But all the same . . ." He snorted once more, and I began to laugh.

"I *could* start an interesting argument as to what you mean by that overworked word 'spiritualistic'," I said. "I don't suppose it's what *I* mean. But if you don't believe in it, why introduce the subject?"

The old boy blinked and coughed evasively.

"Don't believe in it myself," he grumbled, "s'far as I'm concerned, I mean! All mumbo-jumbo—fakes and trickery and so on. But all the same . . ." He ruminated a moment and then brought out, with a queer mixture of contempt and urgency, the reason for his unusual visit to my lonely corner table. "All the same . . . I wish you'd go and see my nephew, John Satterthwaite? Lives in Westminster—making a name for himself at the Bar—married a Trehoweth. Good old Cornish family—nice girl. God-child of mine, 'smatter of fact. Couple of kids too, boy and girl—marriage turning out well—not like some of the damned modern youngsters' marriages. Here to-day and gone to-morrow . . ."

He puffed into his white moustache, and I stared at him.

"If everything in John Satterthwaite's garden is as good as you say, what's worrying you about him?" I said.

He grunted, staring at me obliquely from his squinty little eyes, set in the heavy folds of ruddy flesh above the white moustache.

"Er—well, there you are! Marriage O.K.—but there's *something* upsetting it, all the same. *She* told me about it. She's worried—came to see me the other day. Funny story." He puffed and snorted again. "Wish you'd look him up. You might remember him. John Satterthwaite. He was at school with you—years your junior, but he hasn't forgotten you. Had a sort of hero-worship of you, what?"

Then I remembered! A lean, dreamy little youngster who had attached himself to me with a devotion almost embarrassing when we were both at Marlborough. An odd kid—I'd forgotten all about him. But as the old General talked I "saw" him suddenly as clearly as I see you now, in a clear mental picture. The same youngster, but older, a man grown for all he had retained his wide blue gaze and sensitive mouth . . . and the eyes that looked into mine were suffering eyes. Eyes that begged, that implored help. . . .

I rose from the table and held out my hand to the General.

"I *would* like to see John again, tremendously," I said. "And

if you'll let me have his address I'll write him asking if I may come down and look him up some time soon."

"Right," grunted the old man. "But mind—don't let him think you want to see him because of anything. *He* doesn't know there's anything wrong—at least, that's what I gather from his wife. Just let him know you ran into me and we got talking about him, and all that, and that you wrote off your own bat, see?"

I saw—and wrote to John Satterthwaite by that night's post, suggesting a meeting, to which he returned a delighted letter inviting me to dinner. And two nights later I descended from a taxi before a tall house in Smith Street, Westminster.

Old General Satterthwaite's description of his nephew's abode as a "flat" was not quite accurate. Actually the young couple and their children occupied the whole house, with the exception of the ground floor, this being used as a bachelor flat by the owner of the house, an elderly barrister who was a friend of John's.

The hall was the usual narrow, rather gloomy affair, smelling vaguely of furniture polish and mackintoshes, and furnished with an umbrella-stand, a coat-rack and a black wooden settle upon which nobody ever sat—but a "pram" at the far end, and a child's scooter beside it, brought a flavour of humanity into the rather bleak austerity of the place. I hung up my hat and coat and followed the maid upstairs to a small landing on the first floor—where there were two doors, one directly facing the stairs and one at the side—and as I set foot on the landing the door at the side flew open and John Satterthwaite pounced out on me, seizing my hands and shaking them with an almost feverish eagerness.

"*Pen!* Man, I'm delighted to see you. I've often wondered what on earth had become of you . . . come in, come in!"

He ushered me through the open door into a snug little book-lined study facing the back of the house—evidently John's own particular sanctum, if a rack of pipes, deep leather chairs, a paper-littered desk and various briefs tied with the traditional red tape did not lie. There was a blazing fire on the hearth, and a small table was drawn up near the fire with various drinks upon it. John was on the verge of pouring me out a stiff whisky and soda when I stopped him.

"Don't drink, old chap!" I laughed. "Can't, with the sort of work I do!"

"I'm sorry," said John, and his slightly crestfallen expression was precisely the snubbed little boy I remembered at Marlborough. "I didn't know . . ."

"How should you know?" I said, warming my hands at the leaping flames. "It's merely part of my job. I don't drink because I've got to keep my psychic vibrations steady; a golf-pro who wants to keep in form doesn't drink either because he has to keep his eye steady."

John eyed me respectfully.

"I'd heard—vaguely—the sort of work you'd taken up," he said. "You always used to be interested in queer sorts of things, even at Marlborough, I know—though of course I didn't know you very well then. I was only a miserable little junior, and you were awfully decent to take any notice of me at all! As far as that goes, it's frightfully decent of you to take the trouble to look me up, with all your work and your name and everything."

I began to laugh.

"For two pins you'd call me 'sir'," I said. "Forget it, John! After all, though I may be grey and your wig's still got its pristine blackness, there isn't more than ten years or so between us all told."

He grinned in return—and within five minutes thawed out so completely that we were yarning away, prefacing every sentence with "d'you remember?" just as two old friends always do, and enjoying ourselves thoroughly.

A step sounded outside, and I turned as John extended a welcoming hand to the small, slim figure in black advancing into the ruddy circle of firelight. As I took her hand in mine I stared at her quite frankly, curious and interested. As you know, in the treatment of psychic ills, a man's cure depends—so often, so terribly often!—upon the woman he has married.

I saw a pretty young girl of about twenty-five or so, with reddish-brown curly hair and a short freckled nose, bright grey-blue eyes with a charmingly candid, eager expression in them as she searched my face with interest at least equal to mine. I shook her hand, made the usual pleasantly conventional greeting and turned again to the fire. I was relieved—and yet at the same time faintly disappointed. She was kind and sweet and loyal; obviously devoted to John and longing to do something to help him . . . it was a great advantage, that last, of course, since I have had to do battle sometimes for a man's soul with a woman who is either instinctively antagonistic to me and my methods,

or else frightened to death (which is almost as bad!) or worst of all, who deep down within herself does not *want* her husband to recover! D'you remember the Green Monster case, eh? That was pretty grim? And yet—I was faintly disappointed.

Looking at John's lean-drawn, intelligent face, remembering his passion for books and art, the discussions, amazingly deep and thoughtful for such a little chap, that we used to have together, I seemed to sense that, sweet as she was, this pleasant, sincere little woman he had married was somehow—inadequate! Good and sweet and kind—yet somehow not the kind of outstandingly fine-fibred creature I had pictured as John Satterthwaite's mate. If you get my meaning, I felt that in a crisis she'd do all she knew, pull her damndest—but that she simply would not have the strength for her help to be *worth* a damn! D'you get me?

Well, to go on. We went upstairs to dinner, which was served in a pleasant room on the floor above John's study—a room that, from its scattered toys, work-basket, women's magazines and light, fresh decoration, was as plainly Mrs. Satterthwaite's sanctum as the study was John's.

The food was excellent. Clear soup, fish, cutlets with vegetables—for once really well-cooked—and fresh fruit, as John did not care for sweets; and my hostess chattered cheerfully about the children—who, I gathered, with their nurse, occupied the top floor of the house—about John's recent successful “win” in an important case, about the theatre and the latest thing in hats, and John contributed his share of the talk. . . .

It was when the pink-cheeked little maid whispered to her mistress, “Where'll you take coffee, 'm?” that for the first time I sensed a faint strain in the atmosphere that had been pleasantly friendly and normal during dinner. Margaret Satterthwaite glanced at her husband oddly as she replied, with a curious diffidence that at once made me prick up my mental ears:

“Er . . . in Mr. Satterthwaite's study, I think, Mary.”

But even as she spoke I saw John stiffen with suppressed irritation.

He spoke at once, and sharply.

“Why on earth in the study, Meg? This is the third time lately that you've suggested that—and you know we always have it in the drawing-room!”

“I know, darling,” she murmured uncomfortably. “But it's a

big room . . . a bit draughty . . . the study's so cosy, and Dr. Pennoyer . . ."

He cut across her stammered excuses sharply by speaking to the maid, standing looking doubtfully from one to the other.

"Put it in the drawing-room as usual, Mary." Then to Margaret again with that curious edge to his voice. "Cold—rubbish! There's been a fire there as big as the one in the study all day."

He was palpably annoyed, and I was sorry for the little thing, sitting looking piteous, her big eyes roving miserably from her husband to me and back again—so I stepped swiftly into the breach.

"If it's as cosy as this room and the study it must be delightful," I said. "I've never seen more charming quarters—nor eaten a better dinner. I must congratulate you on your housewifely qualities, Mrs. Satterthwaite, if it isn't out of date to say such a thing!"

The compliment brought a smile, but it vanished as we passed out of the dining-room, went down the stairs to the landing where John had greeted me, and entered the door that faced the top of the stairs that led up from the hall.

The moment I entered the room I realized that the first floor, which was now two rooms—John's study, facing the back, and a large room, the drawing-room, facing the front—had originally been one very big room, L-shaped, with the lower "bar" running across the front of the house, and the upright bar running from front to back. At some time, some owner, who found the large room unwieldy and needed an extra room, had built a wall or partition across the junction of the two bars of the "L", and this created two separate rooms. But still the front half—the present drawing-room—though shorn to half its original size, was a large and handsome room, with a deep fireplace at one side, walls tinted faintly green, and an attractively-worked plaster ceiling the colour of clotted cream; the old parquet floor was waxed and polished till it shone like a sheet of brown amber, and the windows were draped, from pelmet to floor-level, with breadths of a charming green and gold French damask.

There were several cosy chairs grouped about, covered in the same damask, and a long sofa-divan, placed at right angles to the fire, was piled with green and gold cushions. Beside it was a low table where the coffee equipment was already set out, and there was a "baby" grand piano—for both John and his wife

were musical. A white sheepskin rug lay before the fire; there was a walnut bookcase and a writing-table to match; two shell-shaped arched niches, one either side of the fireplace, were filled with more books, and several bowls of ruddy shag-headed chrysanthemums stood about. Altogether a delightful room. Essentially and charmingly English—without a foreign note, one would have said.

Therefore you can imagine what a start I got when, after warming my hands at the fire—for the room was coldish despite John's retort to Margaret at dinner—I turned to face down the room and encountered, fixed flat against the wall that had been built to divide the original room into two—*that!* "

Pennoyer nodded towards the Bronze Door.

"It took up more than half the entire stretch of wall—the door by which we had entered from the landing was just beside it, and looked completely dwarfed by this splendid winged double-shield of dusky-gleaming metal. It was magnificent—and as utterly incongruous as a macaw in a dovecot! What had brought it there? I wondered—and wondering, noted two things. One, that John had lingered behind us as we entered the room, and was standing beside the Door, running his fingers lovingly along the darkly-shining surface of the metal—and the other, that Margaret's hands, as she poured out the coffee into the three waiting cups, were shaking unaccountably. But the impression was a fleeting one, and broken at once as John came up to the fire, and Margaret, the cups filled, handed them round. Still, the impression had been made, and was to recur to me again—that the germ, as it were, of the trouble lay behind the Bronze Door.

"Behind" a door that was set flush, flat like a picture against a flat wall? Yes, you may well laugh! But that *was* the phrase that came to my mind. And as you know, I've been trained not to disregard phrases, however apparently trivial, that come into the mind. They are indicative—descriptive, perhaps, is a better word—of impressions; and though words may not be important, impressions most certainly are.

I nodded towards the Door, and spoke precisely the words you spoke when you first saw it.

"Where *did* you get that? "

I sensed rather than saw Margaret grow curiously tense as I spoke, and John's instant flash of half-defensive suspicion was odd—and instructive. He eyed me half-truculently, half-defiantly.

"Where did I get it? I found it in a one-eyed antique shop in Peking, if you want to know." He drained his coffee cup with elaborate unconcern. "About a year ago, Meg had been very ill and was ordered abroad, and I'd come into a nice little legacy, so we packed the children down to the country, to Meg's mother, and went off for six months. Went all over the place, and incidentally stopped at Peking. I was prowling down a dirty little street, and I saw it." His eyes lingered on it hungrily, lovingly. "It was standing at the back of the shop, half-hidden with carpets and stuffs and so on hung over it. That gorgeous thing! D'you wonder I felt I couldn't leave it there to be used as a sort of super-washing-line?"

"I can't think what possessed you to want it!" It was Margaret speaking, a faint tremor of resentment in her pretty voice. "You've never been particularly keen on antiques before."

John's reply was instant, defensive.

"How often have I tried to explain that I don't know? I just *did* want it. And I still do. I wouldn't be without it for the world."

His eyes dwelt on the Door almost adoringly, and I saw her lips tremble.

"And I hate it!" she muttered.

John compressed his lips.

"Don't let's start that again, for God's sake!" he growled. "Haven't we argued enough about it?" He forced a laugh that was patently unreal. "Let's leave it at that, darling, shall we? That I like it and you don't. But for goodness' sake don't let's squabble before poor old Pennoyer, or he'll wish he'd never come!"

She looked up at me. I saw the glazed look of tears in her eyes, and again a rush of compassion swept over me for a valiant little childish soul up against something she instinctively feared, but could not understand. Again I rushed into the breach.

"That's all right, John," I said, laughing. "If you're going to stand on ceremony with me I shan't come again. Don't bother about me—I'm one of those comfortable people you can regard as a chair or a table."

Meg thanked me with a rather watery smile, and with some murmured excuse about seeing the children, left the room, obviously still on the verge of tears.

John, watching her go, turned impulsively to me.

"Miles, I'm a brute! You must think me an awful cad." His

miserable, repentant eyes searched my face. "I ought not to snarl at her, poor darling—but I don't seem able to help myself somehow."

I felt this was where care was needed!

"I dare say you're overtired for some reason," I said cautiously. "Been doing too much? It always makes one edgy and then one takes it out on one's nearest and dearest."

He sighed, then laughed rather forcedly, and sank down upon the divan beside the fire. I was sitting in a deep chair on the opposite side, and between us the vivid firelight lay like a pool of molten gold. At the far end of the room the Bronze Door faced us, austere beautiful, gleaming sullenly where the dancing light caught it. Hinges clamped solidly against the wall, and where the two leaves met locks, those magnificent wedge-shaped locks of old China, were tight-closed, fastening the two halves together like two close-sealed lips . . . yet why was it that as I looked at it, I had that curious feeling that if Something happened—*what*, I did not know—the Door might open? And that if it opened it would not open upon a blank wall, but upon—something else? But John was speaking, and for a moment I had to banish impressions and listen to what he was saying. He was obviously shy, uncomfortable—not so much reluctant to talk as unable to put what he wanted to say into adequate words.

"It's . . . it's about that screen . . . that Door, I mean." He indicated the shimmering bronze panel, immobile, rigid against the wall. "She's right—in a way—it's creating a sort of split between us, the first we've ever had. I love the Door—it's funny, I've never had that feeling about anything before, and I'm not a collector. But it simply fascinates me . . . and Margaret loathes it. . . ."

"She wasn't with you when you bought it then?" I said.

John shook his head.

"We'd been travelling about for two or three months, and were in Peking for a fortnight. Margaret's got an uncle in the Consulate there, and we were taking China in our stride, as it were. The day I found the Door Meg wasn't with me—she had a headache or something, so I left her to rest in our hotel and wandered about for an hour or two. I bought her some jade beads I thought she'd like, and I was poking about to find some amber as well and I saw—this! "

He raised his head and looked down the long room at the Bronze Door, and I swear the look that came across his eyes

was the look that one sees only in the eyes of a lover who sees his mistress approaching him. Hungry, adoring. . . .

"So you bought it?" I spoke as colourlessly as I could—I was deliberately schooling myself to neutrality; obliterating myself so that he could expand, let himself go.

He turned astonished eyes on me.

"But of course! How could I let it go? I couldn't. Don't you see?"

I didn't see—yet. But his assumption that of course I understood what he meant without his going into details of explanation was useful, and I said nothing, only nodded silently as he went on.

"I couldn't take it home to the hotel, of course, but I gave 'em a cheque there and then and told 'em to pack it safely for transport to England. Then I went back to the hotel. Margaret was better—she was delighted with the beads and interested in what I told her of the Door. . . ."

"So it happened that she didn't see it at all until you came home?" I asked.

John nodded.

"Not until we came home—that's only two months ago." His voice was rueful. "I knew it would arrive before us and I'd written home to my head clerk—he's an invaluable chap—to tell him to have it unpacked and put up along the wall there. And the moment Meg walked in and looked at it—what do you think happened?"

I shook my head, and the finish of his sentence startled me somewhat.

"She fainted! Right here in my arms." His anxious eyes probed mine. "Gave a sort of gulping cry and collapsed without a word—and when she came to she burst into tears and begged me to get rid of the thing! Can you beat it?"

"I can't—at present," I said cautiously. "Hasn't she ever told you why she dislikes it?"

He shook his head.

"No. I don't think she knows. She just hates it, that's all. And I . . ." His eyes roved down the room again and once more the look of yearning love came into them. "I could no more get rid of it than I could cut out one of her darling blue eyes—and yet it looks like coming between us in the end! Things are getting more and more difficult."

He sighed, and getting up, stood warming his hands at the fire,

his back for the minute to the room, as he went on, speaking half to himself, half to me.

"You must think me a complete fool, to waste your time on this your first visit to us talking about what must sound a very common-or-garden row between a couple who can't agree about a mere piece of old bronze-work!" His tone was unhappy, morose. "But honestly—I can't help feeling there's something more in the situation than just that. *Why* does Margaret loathe the thing so—and why do I love it? I can't . . ."

His voice trailed away—but for the last few words I confess I had not been listening. I had been watching the Door, and suddenly I had a feeling, a feeling so strong that it amounted to positive conviction, absurd as it sounds, that *Something* stood pressed close, listening, to the further side of the Door! Something strong, almost dynamic, evil yet not wholly evil—something imperious that called imperially, imperatively! Something that sent out to the man beside me a wave of force so strong that it seemed to me he must needs hear and obey . . . something that struck in me a note of danger, hovering, imminent, that woke every psychic nerve in my body into instant alertness!

I sat up, startled—and then the room door opened. Margaret entered, and as though a tap had been sharply turned off, the "current", whatever it was, stopped. Whatever it was that had been flowing towards John from the Bronze Door was broken, deflected—and I was for the moment thankful. I felt a trifle shaken. Her entrance prevented further private talk, for which I was again rather thankful, as I had gathered plenty of impressions to work on for one night at least.

The rest of the evening passed in pleasant trivial chat, and at about eleven-thirty I took my leave and a taxi back to my eyrie here.

I deliberately avoided any form of concentrated thought as I undressed and got into bed. Settling down, I crossed my feet at the ankle and linked my hands together to ensure the "locking" of the psychic current within my body, sent out a mental SOS for advice, and within a few minutes drifted into a sound sleep. I dreamt most curious dreams! Dreams in which John Satterthwaite—but an older and a different John—and two women played the chief parts; dreams coloured with blood and fire and old tears; dreams lit with gold and glory unspeakable; dreams too tangled and wandering to remember clearly on waking. But in the morning when I awoke I found written on the blank pad of

writing-paper I always keep beside my bed, these words! "Question the woman Margaret."

As usual, They had responded, and I had my instructions.

I wrote a note to Margaret thanking her for a charming evening, and asking her to ring me up—I did not ring up myself for fear of striking a time when John was at home. I wanted to ask her to come and see me alone, and for obvious reasons I did not want John to think I wanted to talk him over with his wife.

She responded eagerly, and we arranged a meeting for tea at the Ritz—one of the quietest and most discreet meeting-grounds I know.

I was punctual to our time, but she was already waiting for me, her eyes fixed with an anxious hopefulness on the big entrance, and my heart warmed to the little thing as she eagerly grasped my hand.

In her smart black suit and expensive furs, with a chic velvet hat framing her soft brown curls and round face, she looked oddly like a small child trying to be sophisticated as she faced me over the shining glass and silver of the tea-table, but her blue eyes met mine bravely.

"I—I hoped you'd ring me up," she said. "I've been so unhappy. I can't even begin to tell you. . . . I wanted so much to talk to you!"

I nodded.

"And I to you, Mrs. Satterthwaite!"

"I hate deceiving John," she said ruefully, "but I *couldn't* tell him I was going to see you! You see, he doesn't want me to talk to you—for fear I get you on my side over that beastly Door!" Her laugh was forlorn. "As though, if I couldn't persuade him to get rid of it . . ."

"If *you* can't, it isn't likely that I can," I agreed. "But can't you tell me something of the inner reason of your dislike of the thing? There must be some—*real* reason, I mean? A reason beyond mere dislike of its looks."

She shook her head.

"It isn't its looks. I think it's gorgeously handsome—though personally I like more simple, rather more cosy things to live with. Yet I think I've got sufficient taste to appreciate the beauty of old things." She frowned. "That's what I can't understand, myself. I can *see* how magnificent this is! I can appreciate what a cinch it was for John to find it, and buy it at the price he paid—oh, awfully little compared with what it's worth! And yet . . ."

Her face paled apprehensively. "I go grey with fear every time I see the thing! Did John tell you what happened when I first saw it?"

I nodded, watching the expressive face.

"I suppose you can't tell me just what rushed through your mind at that moment—no matter how trivial?" I suggested. "It might—help me."

She shook her head.

"No! Nothing—that is, nothing beyond a sudden quite extraordinary and unreasonable shock of terror. A feeling as though something that I'd forgotten for ages—forgotten so that I never knew I'd known it, if you get what I mean?—had risen up before me, and I'd fainted with sheer horror, realizing that it was still there! Not gone or forgotten at all. Still there, more terrible and powerful than ever . . . and it's getting stronger, you know, and John weaker, every day. He's not half the man he was. He's thin and irritable and nervy, like a man who takes drugs, and I've got an awful feeling that unless we can *break* this—whatever it is—he'll somehow go under, though *how*, I don't know . . . do you understand?"

I nodded. She was telling me more than she knew in these stumbling sentences.

"Go on," I said.

She hesitated, eyeing me apprehensively, and I hastened to reassure her.

"I won't laugh, whatever you say. Go on."

She stared at me, and now the grey-blue eyes were darkly violet with fear.

"Do you know, I used to love sitting there after dinner in that room, but now I hate it so much that, as you saw last night, I do all I can to avoid going there at all. And if you ask me just what I feel . . . well, I've always got the feeling that—*there isn't any wall behind the Door at all!*"

I stared at her. This was interesting! *Very* interesting. So she felt it too. . . .

"Do you get any impression of *what* is behind the Door?" I asked.

Again she shook her head. No. No. She felt merely that there was no wall there. As though if the locks were forced apart—which they couldn't be now, John said, they had rusted so long that they had grown welded together, and to force them would break them—but *if* they were, that the Door would open, not

upon the blank wall of an English house, but upon a world of its own! A world that she could not, dared not visualize . . . but a world that did not terrify John, at least, as the mere idea of it terrified her!

I leapt to the alert at once.

"Then he has the same—impression too?"

She nodded, her scared blue eyes on mine.

"Oh, yes! But he doesn't know I know. He—he talks about it in his sleep—he—he *longs* for it, and that's the dreadful part! He's not fighting against the influence at all, that's what is so terrifying, and that's why we can't hope for the least co-operation from him, do you see? You saw how angry he got when I differed from him about the Door—and when he's asleep, or dozing before the fire, he calls and cries for it to open, open and let him through! He talks about a House that's on the other side, and sometimes about a Garden too . . . and when he gets that far"—her eyes dilated—"he starts talking in some language I don't understand! And once—he fell asleep in the drawing-room after dinner. I was coming in very softly so as not to wake him, he'd had a tiring day"—she drew a sharp scared breath—"and he was talking that language *again*! And—I *know* it sounds crazy, but just at the moment that I paused at the threshold to listen, I got the impression that *somebody was answering him*!" Her eyes, wide with fear, stared into mine. "Somebody was talking to him—and *in the same language*!"

"That's *most* interesting," I said. "Have you any idea what the language was?"

Her eyes were darker than ever, her voice was a mere whisper as she made answer.

"I thought—I don't know—but it *sounded* to me like Chinese. I know something about China—my uncle spent years there and he taught me a little Chinese—enough, at least, to know what it sounds like. But that's the terrifying part, don't you see? John doesn't speak any Chinese!"

Well, she'd given me more than a useful lead—and confirmed my own impression that the germ of the whole trouble lay in the Bronze Door. But what *was* the trouble? One day when I knew John was in Court and the coast was clear, I went down to the house and prowled round the damn thing, examined it, deciphered the various phrases woven into the engraved decoration—for I've a working knowledge of most Eastern languages, as you know,

and rather more than that of Chinese—but there was nothing, as far as outward appearances go at any rate, to give me any clue. Nor did I get any “feeling” that time, as I had that first night . . . evidently the Entity that lurked behind the Door was clever and wary enough to be able to “cut” at will any psychic vibrations that extended beyond the Door. And until I could find out who—or what—that Entity might be, that was plainly reaching out after John Satterthwaite to trap and hold him, I was stumped! I tried the Min Yiu process (you remember it, with the five leaves of acanthus and the thrice-knotted thread) and the Yimghaz test, both generally pretty useful, but never got a thing. I’d have tried the Ritual of Hloh, only I hadn’t the proper materials, and it might have taken months to find them, and unless I was gravely wrong in my conclusions, John’s case admitted of no delay. Besides, the door might have defeated even the Ritual of Hloh! Whatever—or whoever—was working on John Satterthwaite through that inanimate slab of bronze was well versed in magic, that was plain. So at last, baffled, I sent out a message once more to Them for advice, and got it as before, scrawled on the pad beside my bed.

“To lure a lion within reach of the hunter, bait the trap with the meat that the lion desireth!”

I knew now what to do, and it only remained to await my chance. If John had been a willing partner, it would all have been easy—but I knew that that was past praying for. He was already ranged, subconsciously at all events, on the side of the Enemy, and all I could do would be to await my chance and take him unawares. So I took to frequenting the house in Smith Street pretty often, and saw, to my concern, that despite obvious and valiant efforts on both their parts to maintain at least an outward semblance of happy normality, the strain between the young couple was becoming more tense, more fine-drawn every day. In a thousand ways it showed itself—the shadows under Margaret’s eyes were growing darker, the harassed lines on John’s face etching themselves deeper and deeper, his appetite flagging, his temper becoming more and more edgy. At last one day at dinner he flared up into a furious temper over some triviality, and she burst into tears and ran out of the room. Instantly repentant, he rushed after her, but returned after a few minutes looking dashed and ashamed of himself. I looked at him reflectively as he sat down, flushed and frowning—again looking absurdly like the small boy I used to know—and determined to force the issue.

"Look here, John," I said, "you aren't being fair to Margaret." He looked at me with haggard, unhappy eyes.

"Don't I know it? I hate myself—but it's getting worse and worse. She's getting on my nerves—and yet I adore her! She's so sweet and gentle and all I want in a woman . . ."

"Then why treat her this way?" I asked, reasonably enough.

He shook his head hopelessly.

"Blest if I know! It's almost as though something was getting at me! Egging me on to be difficult and moody, pointing out all the time in dozens of little ways how irritating she is, what stupid little mannerisms she has, how she can't spell properly, scatters bath-powder all over the bathroom and always puts the oil into the salad-dressing first instead of the vinegar . . . oh, a thousand little idiotic things that either didn't matter at first or that I loved her for! But now it's as if there was a kink in my mind that found everything I found lovable and childish and dear in her—even if it wasn't clever—now simply stupid and exasperating. . . ."

He paused. But now I had got him talking I wasn't going to let him stop.

"Even . . ." I paused for a moment, for this point wasn't specially easy to mention. "Look here, forgive me if I'm over-frank. But has this new impulse, whatever it is, separated you for the moment from your wife? Physically, I mean?"

He nodded shamefacedly and played with the stem of his wine-glass.

"Er—yes. For some time past, as a matter of fact. I . . . I just feel I've got to be alone. It's extraordinary, but I simply *must* be alone these days. And of course . . ." He stumbled and flushed scarlet but went doggedly on. "It's—er—difficult for Margaret to understand why. We've only been married a few years, we're still young . . . and dammit, it's difficult for *me* to understand why too! Till now I've thought it the happiest and loveliest thing in the world to go to sleep with her dear curly little head on the pillow beside me, and her hand in mine. But now . . ." He made a hopeless gesture. "Now all I know is that I've simply got to be alone." He rose with a helpless shrug and moved towards the door. "I'm beginning to believe there's something in what she says—that the Door hates her and wants to squeeze her out of my life, fantastic as it sounds! It's certainly since I had the thing that this miserable business has started."

"Then why," I suggested as I followed him down the stairs,

"why don't you take the bull by the horns and *make* yourself get rid of it?"

He shook his head gloomily.

"Too late now."

We were walking up the long drawing-room towards the fire now. Reaching the divan, John flung himself morosely upon it and lay, his dark head against a pile of coloured cushions, his eyes, set in hollows that were surely now too deep and shadowed for the eyes of a healthy young man of barely thirty, fixed on the Bronze Door.

He stared sombrely at it as he spoke again, half under his breath.

"Too late! I *can't* let it go."

I said nothing. There was nothing to say—but I knew that at last opportunity was coming my way, as it always does if one waits long enough.

I sat and watched him in silence as he lay brooding, eyes fixed on the great glimmering sheet of carven bronze. . . . Mary brought in coffee, and with the coffee came a tiny note addressed to me from Margaret. A pathetic little note excusing herself from coming down again on that useful feminine plea, a headache. Sorry as I was for the poor child, obviously crying her eyes out on her lonely bed upstairs, I sighed with relief as I threw the note into the fire—nothing could have suited me better than to have her out of the way to-night. John was here—alone. Bait for the trap.

Now I knew what to do as clearly as though it was written up before me! Now, unless something went very seriously wrong, Whatever or Whoever waited behind the screen of the Bronze Door could be lured into the open, faced, and—I hoped—defeated. If not . . . well, it looked as though a promising marriage would go the way of many other marriages, to sad and sorry wrack; and what was worse, a promising young man would be caught half-way between this world and the next—trapped, helpless, never in this life, possibly not for many lives, to regain his freedom. And for this, even more than for the mere saving of poor simple little Margaret's happiness, I was prepared to do battle with all the strength and knowledge at my disposal. . . .

We drank our coffee—and since I knew that an extra drink or two on the top of the wine he had drunk at dinner would make John more malleable to my will, I suggested that my tee-total principles might be waived for once in favour of some re-

markably fine brandy that I knew he possessed. I managed to pour my share unseen into a flower-vase, but John, absent and unhappy, since without asking he had guessed the contents of Margaret's note, consumed two good-sized glassfuls, and under the combined influence of the spirit, the warm fire, his own depression, and the waves of silent force that I was deliberately sending towards him to will him to sleep, within less than ten minutes I saw it was with difficulty that he was keeping awake. His eyelids flickered, he yawned and sat up with a jerk and a smiled apology.

"For goodness' sake—I'm a perfectly frightful host, Pen! Feel so damn sleepy—don't you think perhaps I'd better send you home and go to bed?"

But that was the last thing I wanted! I wanted him to sleep in the room beside the Bronze Door—only I didn't want to tell him so! I wanted him completely lax, quiescent. Sending out all the mental force at my command I smiled at him and reached towards his cigar-box.

"Not a bit, old man! Having broken my rules over drinks I want to break 'em over smoking—I used to be a great cigar-smoker, and those look good. Lie back and have ten minutes' snooze while I smoke, and when you wake there's something I'd like to discuss with you."

It worked! Within five minutes that cigar was burning merrily—a tragic waste, as it was a beautiful Corona—burning merrily within the grate, and John was lying sleeping on the divan, his body lax, his lean handsome young face smooth, at peace in the golden glow of the firelight. The trap was baited. Now for the catch. . . .

It seemed untold hours that I sat there motionless within the deep chair. The house was deathly still, only the distant hoot of a passing taxi broke the silence of the night outside, and the occasional crackle and flare as the flames caught a fresh log amongst the pile that filled the huge old-fashioned grate. Now and then I glanced at the clock, but it seemed to march slower and ever more slowly as the hands worked on towards midnight. But waiting never worries me—as you know, one has to do so much of it in my job—and I knew that if I waited long enough my trap would be sprung. Never before—I had discovered that!—never before had John gone to sleep in the shadow of the Door; never before had he been so completely at its mercy. And it was not likely that this chance would be missed. . . .

I knew I would succeed when at last I sensed a tiny ripple, a mere thread of vibration, as it were, coming stealing through the room towards the sleeping man—a “feeler” sent out from the other side of the Door to test the atmosphere. Deliberately I had made myself, after willing John to sleep, as neutral, as non-existent as possible, so as to leave open the way to the trap—and within a few moments that first faint vibration was followed by others and still others until the entire room was quivering and throbbing as though I was in the centre of some infernal powerhouse. Have you ever felt the amazing power of suction of an earthly engine when it is going full speed ahead? The almost irresistible pull and drive of it? Well, though obviously nobody except those with trained psychic sense could have felt or heard any such thing, I tell you that that was the feeling I got in that room—and I realized that whatever force was working from beyond that Door, was working to “draw” John towards it. To suck him into its vortex, sweep him away . . . but *where*?

The sleeper stirred and flung out an arm towards the Door—and suddenly he began to speak. Confused mumbling mostly, and I strained my ears, but could not gather more than a few fragments . . . yet enough to know that Margaret had been right. He was talking Chinese! John, who had visited China only once for a week or so, on that one and only occasion when he had bought the Bronze Door! I realized at once, of course, that it was not the John of to-day who was speaking, but an older John. A John I didn't know . . . and moreover, he was speaking in Chinese that I could not understand at all easily, although I find little difficulty in conversing in modern Chinese. But John was talking the exquisite Chinese of olden days, the all but forgotten Mandarin language only spoken by a few, and those of the great and ancient nobility.

The sinister Force gathered and whirled about him until I almost heard the hum, like a colossal dynamo, of its vibrations . . . but on sending John to sleep I had built a mental Barrier about him that I knew it could not penetrate. Round and round I felt it go, nosing and poking like something almost human, then flinging itself afresh, as though angry and baffled, at the Barrier. But the Masters did not train me for nothing, and the Barrier held! So at last the Force, gathering itself together, withdrew frustrated, as a tide withdraws, back towards the Door . . . and I knew that now the Sender of the Force must admit defeat, or come forth in person to do battle with me!

I sat tense, waiting—then, even as I stared, without a sound the Door opened. Without a sound its ancient locks fell apart, it swung back, silent and smooth as though gliding on new-oiled hinges—and I saw that, as I had felt the first time I saw it, behind the Door *there was no wall at all!*

Through the wide square opening I looked direct into a Chinese room. A room belonging not to the China of to-day, but to Old China—that marvellous civilization that is now only a memory. The floor was covered with fine-woven matting, a great vase of ox-blood porcelain stood in a corner on a black-wood stand, a magnificent embroidered curtain where the five-clawed Dragon sprawled in glittering metallic green upon a background of the royal Yellow hung on one side, and in the background a carved redwood sliding-screen, as fine as lace, was pushed half aside to show a garden where the sun shone on drooping silvery-leaved willows behind an old stone well. Grey pigeons with green and purple throats pecked and cooed beside a great clump of rose-white peonies, a fringe of yellow laburnum blossom hung swaying from the eaves above, and the scent of odorous woods, of flowers and spice and sunshine stole about me. Sunshine and willow trees and peonies . . . and I sat in an English room with a wood fire, and outside was an English winter's night. . . .

But I had no time to analyse. For into the Chinese room, from the garden outside, there walked a Woman! Straight towards the open Door she came—and I knew that, as I had hoped, the Sender of the Force had come in person!

She stood there in the Doorway, motionless as a statue, both hands tucked into the long sleeves of her tunic of plum-coloured silk brocade embroidered with a flight of green and silver butterflies and buttoned high to the neck with ball-shaped silver buttons. Her narrow trousers were of heavy dark blue satin ringed with more embroidery, and her sleek black hair was built high, shining like a helmet of polished ebony, and pierced with gold and enamel pins from which hung scarlet tassels of floss silk. She stood with her tiny bound feet, encased in red embroidered shoes not bigger than those of a child of three, pressed close together; and I knew suddenly, as I watched her, that we in the West know nothing, after all, of Beauty. Of the beauty, fantastic, exotic, amazing, that died when the Old World died. . . .

She stood there for a moment, as though to allow me full chance of seeing her—though whether those immobile dark eyes

under the casque of shining ink-black hair saw me I don't know. That woman could have gone to her death without moving a muscle of her countenance—they taught their aristocratic women self-control in the old days. And this was more than an aristocrat. She was Royal! And as she stepped delicately, like a picture from its frame, out of the Doorway and came swaying down the room towards me, I knew again that when Beauty died, so Royalty died too! For no woman of to-day, no matter what her heritage or birth or lineage, could match the utter grace of that woman's movements, balanced on her bound feet barely three inches long.

I rose silently from my chair and faced her as she advanced. She halted about three feet away from the divan upon which lay John Satterthwaite, still sunk in a deep sleep. But now I know he was not only John Satterthwaite. I remembered his name—for with this woman came a rush of memory of many things. Chen Hwang—of course! Even now, as he lay there in the fire-light, I seemed to see the Chinese aspect impose itself upon the English. The lean dark face—surely those hidden eyes were almond, that curly dark hair black and sleek, those cheek-bones high and long? I stared at her as she looked down at him; at her perfect oval face, the colour of old ivory; her eyebrows, fine-drawn lines of black over long, slanting eyes heavy-lidded and dark as night; her painted mouth like a ripe red plum, tiny, close-shut, immobile—and as I looked my heart sank. For I remembered a pleasant, simple little English face set in a halo of brown curls, and I knew that against this face, still, remote, strong with the relentless strength of untold ages, poor Margaret had not only little chance, but no chance at all.

For a long moment we faced each other. Then the woman raised her head and looked at me, and I drew a long breath and passed one hand across my eyes. Strong? That first glance shook me! It was she who spoke first—if you can call it speaking. I heard, of course, not with the outer ear, but with the inner.

"Why do you try to keep him from me?"

The voice was thin, remote, still—expressionless as the ivory face, like a lovely mask. I knew the voice—now. As I knew the woman—and what I had to do. I answered quietly but firmly.

"Because, Princess, he has work to do here."

Her eyelids flickered ever so faintly, like the movement of a moth's wings.

"I—want him. For untold ages I have searched for him. And never found him, for our ways were set apart because of sin."

"I know," I said.

She nodded, her fathomless eyes upon the sleeping man.

"When he bought the Door—the Door through which he used to come to me in the olden days—I knew it! So I came back to him—through the Door. And I claim him, for he is mine."

"I know," I said again. "You are trying to get him back. But that, Princess, you must not do."

There was a faint pause as she looked at me—and almost I could have sworn a flicker like the faintest shadow of a smile crossed that mask-like face.

"Must not? That is not a word I know!"

"That is not a word you ever knew," I said steadily. "But it is a word you must learn, Princess, before you can claim Chen Hwang as your own indeed. Have you forgotten the old days, and Min Tau, whom he married?"

"I do not forget." The words were faint, but distant as pebbles dropped one by one into a bottomless well. "That little fool! He had married her before he met me—and she was in our way. . . ."

"I remember," I said. For as she spoke I saw, forming before my mental sight like a quick running newsreel, a swiftly-unfolding memory of what their lives had been, hers and John's, in that long-dead day for which they were now paying such grim toll! And needs must that I spoke the truth to her whatever it cost, for only she could truly save him.

"I remember—too well, Tang H'sien! Because she stood between you, you killed her! You gave your servants orders to strangle her—and blind with passion for you, he let you do it, though he knew he could have saved her! Now she is once more upon his hands that he may work out his duty to her—the duty he shelved for love of you in those old ancient days."

She smiled faintly, a smile oddly compounded of defiance, cynicism and utter love, as she gazed down at the sleeping man.

"It is true, Master whom once I knew! As always, you know too much!"

I nodded.

"It is my business to know—to see further than most men."

She looked still down at the man below her. Then she stretched out a slender ivory hand, tipped with the long golden nail-shields that marked her regal birth, to touch his head—and

with an odd little shiver drew her hand back before it had reached him.

"There is a Barrier," she said.

I nodded.

"I have placed one about him, to protect him from the Force you sent out to draw him back to you. *You* know, Princess!"

"I know," she said. "As in the old days, you are too strong for me in many ways—yet in others I am too strong for you! And I know that not even this Barrier that you have set about him can keep us entirely apart . . . if I refuse to let him go."

My heart sank. It was true. I could keep John safe in a measure—but *only* in a measure. Only she could give him back his full freedom, freedom to complete his work on earth and so earn his release, his honourable discharge. Only she could re-close the Door so strangely opened! But—would she? Tang H'sien in the old days had not been notable for generosity—and that small mouth was set firm as a steel trap beneath its crimson paint! Well—she must choose, and for both their sakes, with all my heart I hoped she chose aright.

She stretched forth her hand again and held it over the forehead of the sleeping man. The firelight caught and sparkled on her golden nail-shields as she did so, and in his sleep he frowned faintly and drew a sobbing breath as he murmured a name—her own. Her face was dark with trouble as she withdrew her hand and slipped it once more within her ample sleeves.

"He dreams of me," she said below her breath. "And you—you ask me to let him go! To *Her*. . . ."

"Debts must be paid," I said. "It is the Law."

She bowed her head.

"It is the Law. But what if I defy the Law, as I did last time—and keep him with me? Already he is half mine, and walks the earth in a dream unseeing, half-dazed! Already he is lost to *Her*! He sees her only as a tiresome shadow at his side, a shadow he tries to brush away as one brushes a veil of mist that obscures reality. . . ."

"I know what you are trying to do," I said. "What you have half-done already, indeed. And I know that not even I, with all the knowledge the Great Ones have taught me, can force you to give back what you have already stolen from her—and from him. But I can prevent your stealing more! I can fasten the Barrier about him so that you cannot draw him over to you completely, as you were trying to do."

Her black eyes narrowed dangerously.

"You came—for me—just a few days too soon!"

I smiled.

"They sent me just in time! Yet not in time to save him completely. For unless you give back what you have drawn from him, and let him rise from this tranced sleep a whole man once more, he will live out his life a man walking in a dream. Neither yours nor hers—nor even his own. Wandering, a poor bewildered shadow between two worlds, wholly alive in neither. . . . O Tang H'sien, I beg of you, stand back and let him go!"

Her lips twisted faintly.

"Three thousand years," she murmured. "Three thousand years and more since I lost him, and I had so nearly won him to me again! A short time longer, and so much of him would have been over Here with me, that his earthly body would have faded and died, lacking the inner life that sustained it—and he would have been mine altogether! Even now, the shadow of him that moves beside me in a half-waking dream, is dearer to me than my own soul . . . and you ask me to let him go!"

I paused and gathered myself together. For the vibrations that flowed between us now were so strong, so warring, so rebellious, that now and again even my trained balance shook and quivered on its pedestal, and I seemed to see her, as it were, through water, now strong and clear, now broken, fading and quivering like light on a running stream—and the beauty, the utter womanliness of her, despite the ruthlessness, the cruelty that shot that womanliness through and through as one colour weaves through and over another in a piece of shot silk, tugged at my heartstrings sorely. For despite all the evil I remembered of her in the old days, I remembered good also, and nobility and gracious strength—and mightily I longed to see her take the chance I knew now that They, who make no mistakes, had given into my hands to offer her! The chance to make reparation, of her own accord, for that ancient sin. . . .

The firelight glimmered and sank low, and now there was only a ruddy pool upon the soft white of the sheepskin rug on which I stood. Yet as I looked again she shone out more clearly, standing there in her gorgeous robes, her lovely head inclined to listen, her still hands folded inside her sleeves, her lily-feet pressed close together as a lady of Old China should stand, her eyes fixed on the sleeping face of the man who lay prone between

us—and I knew that on a hair's breadth swung my chance of success, complete or only partial!

For it was true what I had told her. I could if I chose—and it might be that I would have to choose—fasten the Barrier about John for life, so that she could not draw him completely out of the physical world over to her. But I could not give back what she had already won to herself, and I shrank, appalled at the thought of the handsome, brilliant young barrister I knew doomed to a life spent, as I had said, drifting between the two worlds. A dreamer living eternally in a dream. . . .

"Tang H'sien!" I spoke urgently across the flickering pool of light. "If you cling to him—if despite all I can do or say, despite any Barrier I can raise, you persist in clinging to your spiritual possession of Chen Hwang who lies here—what will you gain? You will not only have refused to pay your share of your debt to Min Tau whom you slew, but you will have hindered him from paying his—and all the weary business will be to do again in yet another life, as you well know! *All debts must be paid in full, if not in one life then in another!* Have you forgotten all I taught you, Tang H'sien?"

She shook her head, and a faint half-mocking smile parted those berry-red lips for a second.

"No, Master. I have not forgotten!"

I flung out my arms.

"Then let the memory of those lessons bring forth fruit! O Tang H'sien, of the Royal House of Chung, be generous to this woman, who matters in the long tale of your lives with Chen Hwang but so very little! She counts for nothing, indeed, except a lesson to be learned, a duty to be done—a duty shirked that day three thousand years ago, a duty still to be done despite that shirking. Face your duty, Princess—since when have the women of the House of Chung lacked courage?"

For the first time a shade of indecision seemed to pass like a shadow across that still face, immobile as though carved from a piece of solid ivory. The reply came faintly, almost in the form of a question.

"Lacked courage . . ."

The firelight was fading, and beyond the figure that glittered in the shadows before me it seemed that the Chinese room that still shone out between the wide-flung wings of the Bronze Door loomed fainter, less distinct. The power was waning—I must hurry! I flung my whole soul into one final plea.

"Remember Han Loo, who thrust a knife between her breasts rather than endure disgrace! Tsang Li Shen, who drowned herself to save her father's good name. Wen Chi, who sold herself for a slave to a foreign land to buy her brother's ransom. Are you less valiant, Tang H'sien, than those other women of your ancient House?"

Now for the first time the narrow, heavy-lidded eyes met mine fully—sombre, fathomless as black glass! The delicate head reared proudly on the narrow shoulders hidden beneath the stiff plum-coloured brocade, and one long hand was lifted—in farewell?

"I am not less strong than they! If I give him back . . . if I do this thing . . ."

"If you do," I said steadily, "your debt and his to this little soul whom once you slew is paid! Leave him—go to your own place, Tang H'sien, and there abide patiently the day of meeting! Let him live out his life with this woman, let him discharge his debt. Then—then when he crosses the threshold he will come straight to you, and, all debts discharged, all sins wiped out, They will open the Gates for you both so that you may enter in. . . ."

"And is that the end?" I asked as Pennoyer, pausing, poured himself out a fresh glass of soda-water.

He nodded.

"That's the end. At least, all that matters. All I remember then is a sudden flaming sensation all about me, like the touch of a giant torch passing swiftly through the room! I remember the sound of John's voice crying out something unintelligible in a voice of desolation, of agony and loss unspeakable, and as I blinked and staggered back, half-blinded and breathless, I saw that the Door was shut. Shut—and now, now I knew that there was nothing but a blank wall behind it! Tang H'sien had been true to her race and her word. She had gone—to her own place."

He paused, staring thoughtfully into the fire.

"She was a great woman. A rare woman. A woman who can love a man is comparatively easy to find—but a woman who can love and deliberately turn her back upon love and the lover for that lover's sake, is a rare woman. But she was always rare, was Tang H'sien."

"You knew her, didn't you?" I said. "At least, you seemed to. And she called you 'Master'?"

Pennoyer smiled oddly, and nodded.

"Yes, I knew her—and she me." He rose and crossed the room to where the Bronze Door stood against the wall, a tall shield of dusky metal, its reflections of russet and dull-green, purple and copper and darkest gold ashine on its fretted surface in the firelight. He passed his fingers over it reflectively.

"John woke himself up with that last woeful cry as the Door slammed shut . . . but, of course, he had no idea of what he cried out. Nor of why he cried. Said he'd had a nightmare, but oddly enough thought he felt better for it—clearer in the head. Drank another brandy, and then was all agog to rush away and beg Margaret's pardon for his bad behaviour at dinner. I noticed that as he left the room to go upstairs he passed the Bronze Door without even looking at it. Tang H'sien never did things by halves . . . and a few days afterwards John made me a present of the Door. Said he couldn't think why he'd ever taken a fancy to it—after all, it was a cumbersome damn thing and out of place in an English house, and Meg hated it. So—here it stands as a souvenir, and Meg and her husband are as happy as they can be. The deeper side of John's nature is asleep again, and he thinks his wife all he has ever dreamt of in a woman. But—I hope I shall be there when he and Tang H'sien, their debts discharged, come to each other's arms on the Other Side at last—at the time when all things shall be made clear! "

2

THE CASE OF THE HAUNTED CATHEDRAL

"YES," SAID PENNOYER, "it's a glorious piece of work, as you say. Small, perhaps, as cathedrals go—probably one of the smallest cathedrals in the world, but a beautiful piece of modern architecture. A sad thing that it was its architect's swan-song."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Didn't you know that the man who designed it—Gregg Hart—died six months after it was finished?" said Pennoyer.

He glanced oddly at me and I pricked up my ears, for that sidelong glance generally meant that a story lay somewhere hidden behind the apparent casual speech.

He paused a moment and then added softly, "He committed suicide—was found dead on the altar steps. Didn't you know?"

I shook my head.

"No. It probably happened while I was abroad somewhere—you know how much I miss, wandering about as I do. And besides," sheer honesty forced me to add, "frankly, I'm not much of a religionist, you know, and I don't suppose the death of anybody in a cathedral—even the architect of it—would make any particular impression on me."

"Probably not," said Pennoyer as he turned the leaves of the handsome folder of photographs of Nant Valley Cathedral that I had brought back with me after my recent visit. "But you *are* interested in the odd and the uncanny, and there were stories . . . look!" He stabbed a place on one of the photographs with the point of a pencil. "That's where the body was found. Lying sprawling half-way up the steps, as though he'd tried to reach the altar and failed." He paused and then went on reflectively, "No wonder—and yet he found forgiveness in the end, poor chap, after all."

"After all what?" I said determinedly, pulling my chair to the fire and taking out my tobacco-pouch and pipe. "You settle down and tell me the story that's behind all this, Pen! I know the signs by now."

Pennoyer laughed.

"It's a long one," he said. "But interesting . . . yes, very interesting. I'll get you a whisky and soda, then, and let you hear

it. Odd that by sheer chance, out of interest in modern architecture, you should have gone to see this place—the setting for one of the strangest and most pathetic haunting cases in all my experience. Here you are—help yourself. I never know the right proportion of that poison of yours. Well . . .

“It was about a year after the death of Gregg Hart that I was called in to consultation by the Church Authorities—the Dean and Chapter of Nant Cathedral. I found them in a considerable state of agitation, I may say, and I was soon aware that there had been much arguing and counter-arguing as to whether I should be called in or not. But the matter was getting out of their hands.

“It had all begun, I gathered, even before Hart’s death—stories, rumours, whispers of odd happenings, nothing very tangible, but still they were there. And since his death they had grown and spread so rapidly that they were beginning to have a very bad effect not only on the various church officials, from Canons, major and minor, down to choristers, vergers, lay-clerks, bell-ringers and so on, but even with many of the congregation. Indeed, matters had become so serious that attendances were falling off, and the Dean and Chapter was getting deeply concerned! So at last a special meeting was summoned at which the situation could be discussed and, it was hoped, cleared up to everybody’s satisfaction.

“But unfortunately the meeting did no such thing, as it was found that the opinions of the five worthy clergymen—who, with the Dean as head, formed the meeting—themselves were far from uniform. Canon Hotchkiss frankly scoffed and declared that there was ‘nothing in it’, and that the only attitude was to pooh-pooh everything and carry on as though nothing had happened, hoping that the various rumours would, if persistently ignored, die out in time. Canon Maple was frankly puzzled and apprehensive and admitted that he did not know what to think. Canon Whippet supported him, declaring that the stories were being deliberately spread by the Church’s enemies, and advised police action, while Canon Fraser doggedly maintained, in the teeth of his brother Canon, Hotchkiss, that ‘there were more things in heaven and earth, etc.’. Moreover, he daringly declared that he had himself heard and seen certain matters in the Cathedral that he could by no means dismiss as pure imagination—at which Canons Hotchkiss and Whippet plunged into action and the meeting became something resembling a general wrangle! So the

Dean dismissed it, realizing that united action of any kind was, in the face of such varied feeling, for the moment, impossible.

"So the matter had been allowed to drift on and on, and the rumours grew and flourished, until at last things came to a head when a visiting Bishop, conducting the Communion Service, cried out and fainted as he was holding the Chalice to the lips of a communicant and had to be hastily carried out to the vestry while another priest took his place. The Bishop took some time to recover, and when he did, the first thing he did was to declare that there was an Evil Force abroad in the Cathedral, and that it had tried to prevent the communicant—an elderly woman, a decent, pious body well known to the Dean—from touching the Cup. Questioned further by the perturbed clergy, the Bishop declared that he was holding the Cup out to the communicant when (to use his own words) 'another face—a *man's* face—seemed to slide over hers, to come down like a mask as it were, as though to try and prevent her lips reaching the rim of the Cup—or to get its own there first! And at the same moment I felt a cold hand on my wrist and a voice seemed to whisper, "*No, no!*"'

"The alarm and consternation amongst the clergy at the incident was great, as you may imagine, and the matter was hastily hushed up, and a story concocted to the effect that the Bishop had had a heart-attack. But it was quite impossible to prevent the rumour spreading that *something* had been heard—or seen—by the Bishop, which naturally lent evidence to the stories of other things that had been heard or seen by less important people: and attendances at the services fell off to such a degree that in sheer desperation the Dean called another meeting, and it was decided to try exorcism. But this failed, the hauntings persisted, and at last the Dean—much against the advice of several of his brother-priests, who saw in me a sort of necromancer having dealings with devils, various and assorted—wrote me a note inviting me to come and see him."

"How did he come to know about you?" I demanded.

Pennoyer crinkled up his eyes at me and laughed.

"That, as Kipling says, is another story," he said. "As a matter of fact I dealt with a rather nasty obsession case in which his niece was mixed up. I'll tell you about that another time if you like. But apparently the Dean was sufficiently impressed with that business to risk sending for me—and of course I went down to Nant at once, and found a charming, rather fussy, anxious

little man, with a face like an elderly Donatello cherub and white hair growing in a sort of tonsure round a pink bald pate, waiting to greet me in the drawing-room of a pretty house in the Close. Where's that brochure of yours? I think there's a picture of the Close that shows his house."

He flipped over a page or two of the booklet, and showed me a charming photograph of a row of pleasantly-designed houses, each set back in a neat garden, that clustered round the Cathedral—which stood magnificently alone upon a great stretch of green sward—like a group of guards standing in a square round the throne of a King. He pointed to one of the houses and continued.

"The Dean was a bit shy at first and rang for tea while he talked trivialities. And then a dear little silver-haired sister came in, as round and pink and cherubic as he was. They reminded me irresistibly of a pair of elderly what's-their-names . . . that outmoded celluloid doll that used to be popular with children? Thing with an inane baby face and a blue bow on its tummy."

"I know! Kewpies!" I said with a chuckle. "Go on, I can just see them."

"Well," said Pennoyer, "they gave me a sumptuous tea—home-made scones and jam sandwiches, and chocolate cake in such quantities that I no longer wondered where the dear little man had got the pot-belly that bulged out his cassock like a small football! They were charming; the little old lady twittered at me and pressed cake on me, and at the end of tea we had grown more at ease with one another, so that when the tea and Miss Conover took themselves off together, I sat back in the comfortable leather-covered chair and said to the Dean, 'Now, sir, what's the trouble?' And he told me the whole story quite simply."

"You mean the beginning of the story," I quibbled. "Obviously if he had told you the whole story he would not have needed to ask your advice."

"I hate obvious and rather ham-handed jokes," said Pennoyer severely. "And anyway, if ordinary people could solve psychic problems, where would a psychic doctor like your venerable friend get a living? Anyway, he started by giving me a surprise—because he told me that the Cathedral was haunted by *two* ghosts. One had been seen—or heard—*before* the death of poor Gregg. And Gregg Hart was—or so it was presumed—the second."

I opened my eyes.

"Two ghosts?" I said. "I thought the haunting must be Hart, of course, when you told me he'd committed suicide in the Cathedral itself. But *two*? What could have happened to produce two ghosts in a completely new building? If it had been a hoary old pile . . ."

"I know," said Pennoyer, "but you do sometimes get haunting in a new house, you know—generally a ghost that belongs to an old house that has been pulled down to make way for the new! I remember once in a brand-new ultra-modern steel-and-glass bungalow built by a rich young man on the Sussex Downs— Still, that's not the yarn I'm telling. But apart from that, a double haunting sounded interesting, so I asked the Dean to go into details.

"He told me that rumours that the Cathedral was haunted were pretty widely spread several months before Hart's death. Precisely when they started he did not know, but certainly he became aware of them about three or four months before the building was finally completed. The story was that it was a *child-ghost*—sometimes seen, or more often, footsteps pattering, the flutter of a frock, a childish voice singing or whispering, that sort of thing—even some of the workmen engaged on the building swore they had seen something. And in connection with this, the Dean said, an odd incident occurred.

"Gregg Hart was fulminating to him, as he so often did, about the slackness of some of the men, about their readiness to knock off early, even before the dusk drew in, and jokingly the Dean said perhaps they were anxious to leave before dark for fear they might see the ghost of the child that there was so much talk about . . . and this remark had the most alarming effect. Hart went absolutely green, and almost collapsed! Frightened the Dean to death—though Hart recovered in a minute or two and passed it off—but it was obvious, said the Dean, that Hart himself had seen or heard *something*, or why should he look so scared and sick? Later on, of course, I had another theory, but for the moment I accepted the Dean's, and he went on. Apparently it was about a month after that conversation that the Cathedral was finished and consecrated, and three days after the consecration Hart was found dead in the nave of the Cathedral—and *then* the double haunting started!

"I began to be distinctly interested and asked for more details. How many people had seen the two ghosts together—when and

how, for how long a time—and the Dean answered me with a tense frown on his chubby face, obviously trying to be as exact as possible. Reports varied, it seems—probably with the varying psychic perception of the seers. Some people apparently saw only the child . . . a faint, shadowy sort of shape flitting round the High Altar or running across the chancel; others said they had seen a man only, an outline, tall and dark; a *very* few said they saw the two together; while many people complained of a feeling in the Cathedral of intense unhappiness, of strain and distress—one described it as ‘a sort of spiritual tumult indescribably painful and bewildering’. And of course there was the usual lot who didn’t actually see or hear anything concrete, but who merely sensed an ‘atmosphere’ about the Cathedral—especially towards evening—that made them feel uneasy. Oh, it was a nice haunting case. Very thorough and complete. . . .”

“How did Hart come to die there . . . on the steps of the altar?” I said. “Singularity dramatic! Was it an accident?”

Pennoyer glanced at me.

“It wasn’t,” he said briefly. “He committed suicide. Took poison . . .”

I felt a faint thrill of horror and pity combined. To commit suicide on the steps of the altar of the great Church that was the crown of one’s life-work, the very peak and summit of one’s ambition! For a man to do this must surely mean reaching a pitch of despair the very thought of which chills one’s blood. . . .

“Again, for the sake of the Cathedral, this was hushed up, and the doctor gave a verdict of death by heart-failure,” said Pennoyer. “Luckily one of the vergers coming in early in the morning found the body, locked up the Cathedral and ran to fetch the Dean. The Dean’s brother—who’s a doctor—was staying with him then, and they went over together. Dr. Conover knew what a dreadful business it would be for the new Cathedral to start its ministries, as it were, by having to wipe out the stain of a suicide’s blood, so heart-failure it was, officially, and all was well. I don’t think anything queer was suspected by the world outside the Close, nor even inside, until the double haunting started. . . .”

“But what on earth?” I began incredulously. “What reason . . .”

“You’ll know, all in good time,” said Pennoyer. “Well, I wormed all I could out of the Dean about Hart. I was specially anxious to know the reason for his suicide . . . but this last nobody seemed to know. Hart had lived in Nant—more or less, at

least—for the last three or four years of the building of his masterpiece. He rented a small house in the village, and the old woman who owned the house 'did' for him—and as far as anybody knew, there was no reason why he should have thrown away his life so pitifully. He was still only fifty-six or so, had a fine name, the building of the Cathedral had set the coping-stone on an already notable career, he had plenty of money, more commissions than he could deal with . . . he was unmarried, and had no particular troubles as far as the outside world could discover.

"But I gather he was a terribly difficult man to deal with—as many geniuses are, of course—and during the last two years he had become more and more difficult. In fact, the Dean told me that his old landlady, Mrs. Griffiths, often declared that if it hadn't been for her being so deaf that she didn't hear his swearing and cursing when he was in one of his rages, she would never have stayed with him so long. I gather he used to write down his orders and she carried them out, and so life remained peaceful for her, at all events . . . if a man has to start expressing his anger by means of writing, it flickers out!

"I understand, from what the Dean said, that though Hart must always have been a moody, awkward-tempered cuss, he grew much worse during the last year of the Cathedral's building, as various hitches occurred from time to time in the delivery or the execution of the work that used to infuriate him to almost madness . . . and there were times, the Dean said, especially towards the end, when he feared seriously for his reason. The last few months must really have been hell-and-blazes for all concerned, as between the stories of the child-ghost putting the men off their work, and Gregg Hart going apparently bit by bit off his head—well, life was simply awful, and my poor little Dean was driven almost hysterical at times."

"Well," I said, "frenzied rages, however unpleasant they may be for a man's friends and acquaintances, don't necessarily mean lunacy, or even weakening of the brain!"

"I know," said Pennoyer. "But, apart from what Hart *said*, he really did, it seems, start behaving more than a little oddly towards the end. It appears that he was naturally a rather solitary, surly sort of bloke; hated society, made very few friends, refused all the local ladies' invitations, though they tried hard to lionize him, till they found it wasn't any use. He used to go up to his London studio pretty often, and now and then he'd

bring back a brother-architect or artist to have a look at the Cathedral—but mostly he kept very much to himself in Nant. Used to spend hours by himself in the Cathedral after the workmen had gone, walking about and studying it, and thinking out endless new details . . . the place was his mania, he'd lived and dreamt and planned and hoped for it for years, and his real absorption in and love for his work was one of the things that made the Dean and others forgive him for a good many *bêtises*.

“But towards the end he changed very much—he seemed to avoid the Cathedral after dark, and wouldn't go there alone even during the day if he could help it. And another thing was odd! From being a teetotaller—or very nearly—he took to drinking in a big way. And from being a moody, solitary sort of a chap, never going out and snubbing any overtures of friendship, he suddenly took to accepting any invitation that was thrown at him, and clinging so persistently to anybody who would tolerate him as to become something of a nuisance. Didn't seem to want to be alone—ever—especially at night! Of course, not only this caused a lot of talk, but his changed attitude towards the Cathedral, his reluctance to go into it except during the daytime hours, or when there were others about, revived the rumour that he had seen the child himself—but when this was hinted to him jokingly at some party or other, he first went white and then flew into such a violent rage that it was never mentioned afterwards. Of course, it may have been true and he *had* seen the child, but didn't want to admit it. The very violence of his reaction to the suggestion rather seems to suggest that. . . .”

“When did the Dean see him last?” I asked.

“About three days before he died,” said Pennoyer. It was at the consecration—a great occasion, of course, with all the County there, and the choir-stalls packed with clergy from all over the diocese, and a garden-party with champagne and strawberries at the Dean's afterwards, and I don't know what-all! Apparently Hart had been very white and *distrain* all day, and during the consecration ceremony he gave a queer kind of cry and collapsed in a heap in his pew. He was taken out and looked after at once, and though of course it *might* have been that he had merely been overcome with quite natural emotion at seeing his greatest achievement completed at last, still some people whispered and looked at each other queerly, because as he was coming round apparently he raved and wept and talked hysterically about some child or other . . . but there was nothing

definite to be made out of what he said. Of course, he may not have been talking about the ghost-child at all, but about a perfectly ordinary child—but the obvious conclusion was drawn once more. And when he became conscious, he looked, I'm told, truly ghastly, with his eyes sunk in his head and his face lined like an old man's. After that his fear of being alone amounted to a mania! He hung round people till he became a perfect plague, and actually tried to persuade the Dean to let him come and live with him as a P.G.; but apart from the fact that poor Hart's temper made him anything but a pleasant housemate, the Conover *ménage* had no room for a third person—and a few days after that Hart was found dead in the Cathedral on the steps of the altar. And it was after this that the double haunting began, and the Cathedral of Nant Valley began to be deserted by its worshippers and dreaded by its servants, until the afternoon came when I sat in that pleasant little drawing-room with Dean Conover, eating hot scones at a Chippendale table, and promised him I would do my best to lift the cloud that was impeding the work of his beloved Church! ”

Pennoyer sat back, took a sip of orange-juice and continued.

“ Obviously the first thing to do was to examine the ground for myself, and I requested permission to spend the night in the Cathedral, which I got without difficulty. It was not without a certain amount of trepidation that I nodded good night to the elderly verger who led me to a pew facing the High Altar, tucked me round with a rug—I had come provided with a warm coat, a rug, a flask of coffee and sandwiches, as it was not my first experience by a good many of the dank chilliness of these vigils!—and I heard his footsteps going slowly away down the long echoing nave towards the door. The faint click of a distant latch told of his departure, and I sat back staring up at the magnificent arched chancel before me.

“ The moon was high, and I could see sufficiently well to appreciate the austere beauty of the place.

“ The scent of the incense from the evening service that had taken place before still lingered faintly in the air, and mingled with the strong sweet odour of the Madonna lilies that shone like white stars in the gloom from the tall brass vases on the altar, whose green velvet frontal, embroidered from end to end with embossed gold and silver thread, gleamed richly at the head of the flight of seven shallow steps of black and white marble that led up to it. I stared at those steps, seeing in my mind's eye

the sprawled body of the dead man as it had lain along them when they found it—and my eye travelled from the steps to the gilded altar-rail of the Sanctuary, up to the altar and the gorgeous reredos behind it, all goldwork, mosaic and carving, with the great golden Crucifix in the centre, and up again, higher still, to the six tall narrow windows that rose above it, their shape echoing the six tall narrow candles that flickered on the altar between the lilies. Windows that repeated in their lustrous stained-glass panels set with jewels, the myriad colours of the reredos.

“High above the chancel swung the seven lamps, like seven glowing ruby eyes eternally on duty, guarding the shrine. . . . I blinked at them and shivered, yawning and wondering whether it was imagination, or was I really feeling oddly shivery, with that queer inner chill that means something ‘otherworldly’ coming near? A chill utterly different from the mere gooseflesh brought about by normal cold. . . .

“I glanced at my watch. It was just on twelve o’clock, and though my experience has taught me that ghostly happenings do not by any means necessarily *only* take place at midnight, yet that witching hour is still the time when the veil between the Two Worlds wears thinnest, and queer things are most likely to happen.

“There was no sound—the utter silence of a great structure like that, in the dead of night, has to be felt to be believed. There is no real silence out of doors, no matter how dark the night. In the city there is the occasional hoot of a taxi, the measured tread of a policeman, voices and laughter as a stray group of party-goers hurries home, the rumble of a distant electric train or an early market-cart, the squall of a lovesick pussy-cat abroad on the tiles—and in the country the cheep of sleepy birds, the stealthy rustle of a prowling night-hunter in the undergrowth, an owl’s hoot, the sigh of wind in the branches, the bark of a watchdog, a thousand other sounds. But there, within this immense pile of masonry, soaring skywards God knows how many feet above my head, there was a silence that could be felt, almost handled, and accustomed as I was to eerie atmospheres, I had to gather all my strength of mind and courage to meet it without a qualm!

“I sat there watching the altar, wondering whether amongst the shadows that I thought I saw moving aimlessly about before it there loomed already the dim shape of a man—or a child?—and warning myself to keep my imagination quiescent, to free my-

self merely to observe, not to invent. I had been told that the Cathedral had been haunted by a child and a man, and that knowledge might impel me, if I were not wary, to construct those actual shapes out of the vague movement of shadows, out of the effect of the moonlight that fell, blurred and strangely coloured by the many-hued glass through which it filtered, in long narrow panels along the marble floors of sanctuary, of chancel and of nave. . . .

"But even as I told myself this, I was conscious of a growing tension in the atmosphere about me, of a sense of palpitating emotion rising and growing stronger and more painful every moment, that beat about my spirit as the waves beat about the foot of a rock, disturbing it, threatening, almost, to overwhelm it! Holding my inner senses steady, I tried to analyse the rising tide, to sort out its component parts, knowing that if I could only do this I might find some clue that would lead me towards the inner heart of this mystery.

"I was conscious, first of all, of a queer sense of bewilderment—of frustration and suspicion—and then suddenly fear seized me, an almost panic terror! But it was not *my own* fear that I felt. I was sensing the fear that had been felt by someone else—that somewhere was *still* being felt! I felt that fear reach out and touch me, and the first vibration mingled with it, that strange wild sense of bewildered frustration—but now it was rising rapidly to anger mingled with hate, both fierce and turbulent, yet, I felt, directed not so much at any thing or person in particular, as against all things and all men alike. I got a sense of blind, thwarted rage akin to the lunatic fury of a madman who, driven by forces beyond his comprehension or control, turns and rends whatever comes nearest to his hand, blind to all but the furious need to assuage by action, the more violent the better, the fever that is riding him! All about me these furious vibrations raged and swirled, strong as a palpable tide almost, bewildering and distressing to such a degree that confusedly I thought that with my actual ears I heard sounds of weeping, of curses and cries of rage and anger, the gnashing of teeth and thin wails of mortal fear. . . . I had to hold tightly to my sense of balance, and my heart swelled with pity for whoever it was, how many or how few I had no idea, that was sending forth these waves of such desperate suffering!

"I stared steadfastly up at the altar, which, as far as I could make out, seemed to be the focus from which these vibrations

swept outwards into the main body of the great pile, and, holding tightly to the carved wooden arm of my pew, and mentally concentrating upon the great golden Cross above the altar, tried to keep my head above the waters of the wild tide of emotions that whirled and strove about me, and then suddenly—I saw it! A tall, dark shape that stood half-way up the altar steps. A figure very faint and indistinct—but clearly the figure of a man.

“I had never met Gregg Hart, and in any case the shape was too shadowy for any features, etc., to be seen in detail—and moreover, as he stood looking up at the altar, his back was towards me and I could not see his face. But it was a man tall and lean and rather stooping, as they had described Hart, wearing lightish trousers and a loose dun-coloured coat—and the Dean had told me that Hart’s working attire was invariably light grey flannel trousers and a brown tweed jacket. He was standing half-way up the shallow flight of steps below the altar, staring up at it, as though waiting or watching for someone. He stood perfectly still, and all the time that maelstrom of tangled emotions surged about me, anger and fear and bewilderment, blind fury and mortal anguish. And now I perceived that a fresh element had entered into that dreadful tide that beat about me! The sense of guilt. Somewhere, someone was either suffering or had suffered—I was too confused and shaken to be able to distinguish which—some overwhelming sense of shame, of horror, of self-loathing so immense as to be truly dreadful! Someone, groveling, abject, wept in agonized guiltiness, without hope of forgiveness or of pity. . . .

“And then suddenly I saw that at one corner of the altar there was another figure—the figure of a child! She stood, or rather crouched, against the dull green-and-gold shimmer of the altar-frontal, watching the tall shadow of the man standing below her at the further side of the altar steps—and even as I followed her I saw that he was not there any longer! As though the appearance of the child had meant his banishment, he had vanished like a blown-out candle-flame, and only that shrinking little shape was left, cowering there in the dusk.

“I leant forward eagerly, straining my eyes to see through the gloom, and as I moved she moved also, creeping cautiously along the front of the altar as though only now, after the disappearance of the man, did she dare to make a movement. She stood for a moment or so before the altar, fingering the embroidery and the lace, reaching up to try and touch the flowers or the tall brass

candlesticks, and staring vaguely up at the great golden Crucifix that shone high in the centre of the altar against the reredos. Now I could see her more clearly, thanks not only to the moon that, coming out of the clouds, threw a stronger light through the tall windows, but to a faintly shining quality that seemed to outline the forlorn little figure as though a luminous pencil had drawn her upon the dusk. It was a poor little scarecrow of a child—a girl of about seven or eight years old. A little girl dressed in a ragged red frock—the colour showed in the gloom like a dark red rose against the altar-frontal—with wild dark tangled hair, hatless and barefoot. I could see no detail again, no distinguishing feature—the shape looked like just another of the poor, poverty-stricken little slum or gipsy children that, alas! were all too common in the mining districts that lie close to the fringe of the Nant Valley. . . .

“For a few moments she lingered near the altar, then turned, and coming to the top of the altar steps, seemed to pause a moment—then came warily down, and turning sharply to the right, darted across the shadow-striped floor of the chancel and disappeared through the choir-stalls in the direction of the vestry. I waited several minutes, but she did not appear again, and I was conscious now that the tide of strange and exhausting emotions that had been endeavouring, it seemed, to engulf me, was slowly withdrawing itself, retreating once more to whatever place had sent it forth.

“This, then, was the sense of ‘something dreadful’ which many people experienced, even though they had not seen either of the ghosts. ‘Spiritual tumult and suffering’—the Dean was right. I had—as I had hoped—seen and felt it all, and I blamed nobody for avoiding the Cathedral! I waited until that shattering flood of vibrations had completely faded away and then got up, shivering with cold, damp with the sweat of emotion and excitement, and feeling as limp as a rag, realizing that my ordeal was over—for one night at least. And what had I learned?

“It was in a rather sober mood that I left the Cathedral, now dark and still, untenanted and undisturbed, and made my way across the smooth stretch of turf to the Dean’s house in the Close, where I was staying—he had said, and I agreed with him, that it would cause less comment and keep my real errand private if I merely came to stay with him as a friend. I tumbled thankfully into bed—though it was not yet one o’clock I was tired to death from the intense psychic strain of my experience—and slept

soundly until eight o'clock, when I bathed and dressed and went down to breakfast with the Dean, who was waiting on tenterhooks of interest to hear my report. Miss Conover always breakfasted in her own room, so we were alone, and I plunged at once into my adventures of the night.

"He sighed faintly as I finished, and nodded.

"Yes—yes. It happens just so. Sometimes the child is seen—sometimes the man; sometimes it is only that dreadful atmosphere that is felt, and people are terrified and won't come into the place again.' He sighed. 'I can't say I blame them! I have felt it myself—though I have seen nothing. But the *feeling* is awful—that dreadful mingling of rage and fear, of shame, of agony of mind. . . .' He shivered and stopped. 'What is your opinion, Dr. Pennoyer? Or haven't you had time to form one?'

"I haven't—yet,' I replied. 'I think I have seen the haunting—or rather hauntings—complete, so to speak, because that is the work I've been trained to do. To see the whole where less highly-trained sensitives only see, as you say, in scraps. But precisely what these two poor souls have to do with each other—if anything!—I don't know yet. Nor do I know the meaning of that whirlpool of terrible emotions that comes with them—whether that again belongs to those two, or does it perhaps mean a third and quite separate sort of haunting? Though I feel the three belong together in some way. As regards the more mature elements in the vibration wave, I think most of them emanate from the man. Somehow, some of them . . .' I hesitated . . . 'the overwhelming feeling of shame, for instance, and the sense of violent anger and desire to destroy . . . these seem to me too mature, if you know what I mean, for a child. The child-element comes through, I fancy, on the *fear*-vibration . . . but what had she to fear, and what has that to do with the man, if anything?'

"If it was an older building,' said the Dean, 'I would have thought one or other of the hauntings dated back to ancient times. But that can't be. The Cathedral has only been finished and open for worship six months.'

"It hasn't been built on the site of an older church by any chance, has it?' I said. 'Because in that case it might have "inherited" a ghost from the earlier building.'

"The Dean shook his head.

"No,' he said decidedly. 'It was built on virgin ground—

the land was part of a park owned by Sir William Nant, who gave it over to the Church as a thanksgiving for the recovery of his only son from a long illness.'

"There was evidently no solution there, and I brooded over the problem all day, but without much success. I examined the altar and all about it as a matter of routine, but without finding anything whatever out of the ordinary; so I decided to go once more to the Cathedral that night to see if anything more enlightening took place.

"The night was darkish, and it was only occasionally that a chance shaft of moonlight managed to pierce the high windows and help the dim red glow of the high-hung Sanctuary lamps . . . but it all happened again, just as before. Again the tide of warring emotions rose about me, shaking and horrifying me with sheer pity and terror both and longing to help—and as the tide rose to its climax, came the man standing on the altar steps, and then the child.

"I sat through the same painful experience, and all happened as before until the little figure of the child came down the steps and darted away into the dusk through the choir-stalls—and on her disappearance immediately the atmosphere lightened, the sense of oppression vanished, and within a few moments I could sit back, breathe and wipe my sweating brow and wonder how much more of this I must endure before beginning to find some solution of the problem. If I could find out where the child disappeared to it might help. So shaking off my rug, I followed in the direction where the figure of the child seemed to have gone, and found myself in the Dean's vestry, from which an outer door, now locked, led out upon the green platform of turf that surrounded the Cathedral. The vestry was open and empty but for various surplices hanging ghost-like from their hooks, and as I peered from the little window I saw, with the aid of the moon, that had for a moment floated clear of the clouds, that the smooth green turf lay quiet, untroubled by a shadowy little figure flitting across it. The child had disappeared again, leaving no trace, and again, disappointed, I returned to the Dean's house and to bed.

"Well, for about a week, night after night, I kept this tedious vigil, without any sort of result, except considerable exhaustion on my part, and I was really beginning to wonder whether I might have to write this case off as one of my failures—which I should have very much disliked doing!—when by sheer chance one night

I forgot the latchkey with which the Dean had provided me so that I could let myself in on my return without waking the household.

"I had been through the selfsame experience that night as all the other nights—the two figures, the awful sense of despair, of fury, of mortal fear, and it had ended as it always did, with the disappearance of the child's figure into the shadow-filled choir-stalls—and again I had followed her and tried to see where she went, but without success. Either I was never quick enough to catch her leaving the Church, or else she simply did not exist—or appear, however one might describe it—anywhere except in the Church itself. If this were true, indeed, as far as I saw, I stood little chance of solving the problem!

"The grim and pitiful scene looked like going on indefinitely, like some ill-omened film shown every night in the heart of the new Cathedral to anyone who dared to watch, and I was definitely feeling rather cast down about it as I left the Cathedral and crossed the close-cut grass and approached the Dean's house—and finding I had left the latchkey in my bedroom, cursed my folly roundly! It was barely one o'clock in the morning. I was tired and depressed, and the prospect of either having to walk about all night, sleep in the Cathedral, or else rouse the little man's household to let me in, did not please me at all.

"I tried the front door, but it was securely locked, of course. I went round the neat little garden to the back door, to find that also locked, and there remained only one hope—the Dean's study at the back of the house. If he had forgotten to shut and latch the window, as in his absent-minded way he might have done, I *might* succeed in getting in that way. I thought I spied a faint light between the folds of the half-drawn curtains and wondered whether he might possibly be sitting up reading late, as occasionally, defying the disapproval of his sister, he did.

"I stepped as lightly as I could between the plants below the window and peered in—and got the shock of my life. The thick velvet curtains hung well apart, and I could see most of the room—and the light within came from no earthly lamp or candle! It came from the shape of a child that stood in a far corner of the room, beside a large closed desk. Yes, it was *the* child—my little ghost!

"Here, seen at closer quarters, she was more distinct, and indeed the faint light that seemed to hang about her shone out in the darkness of the room as though she was surrounded with a

queer kind of phosphorescence. Yes, there she was, that red-frocked, ragged little shadow with bare feet and tangled dark hair falling shaggily over its eyes, like that of a little wild thing of the woods rather than a child of human parentage. For a moment I stood transfixed, staring, as she stood by the desk, stroking its surface, passing her hand over it with that absorbed attention, almost wondering, that a child gives to something that holds some peculiar interest for it . . . then in the blink of an eye she was gone, and with my heart thumping with excitement I managed to push the window open (which was, as I had hoped, ajar), and scrambling into the room, went to examine the desk where she had been standing.

"I was disappointed at first. It was a handsome but perfectly ordinary modern rolltop desk, with nothing notable about it in any way. If it had been an antique piece, I felt it would have held out more promise. . . . But anyway, this was getting somewhere at least outside the Cathedral, and directly after breakfast that morning I tackled the Dean.

"He was most excited at my tale, and when I told him where the child had been standing, his cherubic pinkness deepened almost to crimson in his excitement.

"My dear sir—my *dear* sir! But that is a desk that I bought at the sale of poor Gregg Hart's belongings! It belonged to him!"

"I bounded out of my chair.

"That was Gregg Hart's? My God, then we've found out at least something. There is a connection between him and the child, though what, it remains to be seen . . . at least we've solved that much. They are not two independent hauntings, but one—connected by some link that we've still got to find. Perhaps that link is hidden in that desk. . . ."

"By this time we were both out of the breakfast-room and in the study, and the Dean was fumbling with the key of the desk. It was, he explained, not used very much as a rule. He had bought it for the use of his sister, to keep her account and house-keeping books in, the notes and records of her various activities connected with the Church, the Dorcas Society, Mothers' Meetings, Y.W.C.A., Girl Guides and all the rest—but the little lady had been disappointed in it. It was too large and masculine in type for her taste—more suitable for her brother's study, she had acidly declared, than for her pretty drawing-room! So it had remained in a corner of the Dean's own study, though, devoted to

his own desk, he did not use it—he had, indeed, intended to sell it again and buy his sister another desk that would tune in more effectively with the Chippendale furniture that was her passion. Meanwhile she was using the pigeon-holes at the top to store a few odd papers in, but the drawers were all empty, as far as he knew. . . .

“Without waiting for Miss Conover’s permission—another sin for which I fear the little Dean subsequently got into trouble!—we turned out the desk thoroughly, finding, as the Dean had predicted, that all the drawers were empty, though the pigeon-holes were fairly full of odd papers, bills, recipes, lists, letters, account-books, notes, brown-paper and string, a varied collection of small boxes, labels and similar small things. We sorted all these out with meticulous care, but found nothing at all relevant to the matter we had in hand. We pulled out the drawers and looked behind them, but even when the whole thing stood gaping, empty, I still had the feeling that there *was* something there to be found, if only we could find it . . . and sure enough, there was!

“I have made something of a study of secret drawers and the like, as you know. Many of these modern desks have a secret drawer somewhere, and this one had—cleverly concealed behind the pigeon-holes that filled in the back of the desk. I fumbled about for a while, but at last I found the tiny catch for which I was looking—four pigeon-holes came forward in a solid block. I lifted them out, and behind them was a tiny door! It was locked, but I easily forced the lock with the tiny pocket-jemmy that I always carry—which made the Dean’s eyes bulge somewhat!—and a crumpled litter of papers tumbled out, and with them a little red-leather-covered pocket book.

“As I pounced on it the Dean gave an exclamation.

“‘A diary . . . Gregg Hart’s! I’ve often seen him use it.’ A faint qualm seized him. ‘A dead man’s secrets . . . my dear sir, do you think we ought. . . .’

“‘I don’t know what *you* feel you ought to do,’ I said with firmness, ‘but *I’ve* been called in to get rid of this haunting that is ruining your lovely Cathedral, my dear Dean! And with your leave—or without it—I intend to leave no stone unturned until I do. This diary—all these papers—may be of untold value. I am going to my room now to study them from beginning to end.’

“I spent an absorbing two hours. The loose papers were of no value, though I examined them with care; there were drafts of letters—mostly of a rather acrimonious sort, showing that the

rumours anent poor Hart's bad temper had by no means been exaggerated!—bills, notes, a few odd sketches, and so on. But the diary. . . . As I read it I shuddered, and yet all the time I felt, beside my horror, that sense of overwhelming pity rising within me again. . . .

"The diary started about a year before the finishing of the Cathedral—started, it seemed, almost at random. Something like this.

"'. . . a positive hoodoo on this building! Another man ill—this means those murals held up again, for God knows how long. *Why* must it be my key-men who always fall ill?'

"A few days later . . .

"'Driving me mad, these continual hitches. The very weather against us. Would have thought that spire proof against any storm . . . and now they say there must have been some weakness in the construction, to bring it down! I lost my temper . . . said what I suppose I ought not. Do they think me an amateur not to know how to choose sound stuff, or how to construct? Stupid . . . but one's tempted to wonder if there isn't something in the old idea that the Devil hates the building of a church and tries his best to stop it. . . . Something positively uncanny about these continual hindrances . . .'

"Later again it went on:

"'Yes, it *would* happen to me! The only earthquake for fifty years—and only a tiny one, they say, but enough to crack my marble flooring . . . simply isn't natural for these misfortunes to come one after another. And yet I swear I *will* finish it, my *magnum opus*, the loveliest thing I ever built! These things are maddening . . . can't sleep, can't eat, and my nerves are getting frightful. . . .'

"I read on slowly and carefully, page after page, seeing with a mixture of pity and fear the man's storm-torn mind as the feeling gradually grew upon him that there was something uncanny, inimical, fighting against the completion of the glorious creation upon which he had set his heart. . . .

"The luncheon bell rang before I had got more than half-way through the diary, and slipping the book into my pocket I went down to join the Dean and his sister.

"The little lady had already got over her annoyance at our ruthless rifling of her papers, and smiled upon me as she doled out plentiful portions of roast duck and green peas, with apple-charlotte to follow.

"Over coffee with the Dean in his study afterwards, I told him something of what I had already found in the diary. The Dean's face lengthened with pity.

"'Poor fellow!' he muttered. 'Poor fellow! Oh, yes, I know that towards the end, in spite of all that I could say, I fear he really began to believe that something that was not of our world was deliberately thwarting him—holding the work up, trying to prevent its completion.'

"'Was there *really* an undue amount of difficulty in getting the Cathedral finished?' I asked.

"The Dean wrinkled his brows.

"'Well,' he said, 'there *were* a great many hindrances, I'll admit, of one sort and another, especially during the last year, when that diary was written—though I think to Hart, with his excitable, hysterical temperament, they loomed larger and more sinister than they would have done to a more steadily-balanced man. After all, there are hitches, delays, disasters in the building of any place, great or small! There was a strike amongst the masons at one time, and then I remember two Italian expert workmen engaged on the mosaics behind the altar fell ill and were in hospital for several weeks so that work was held up, as nobody could touch that sort of work. Then the first spire blew down in a storm, and then a transport ship bringing a cargo of special Sicilian marble sank—and again, there was an epidemic of influenza that kept three-quarters of his men away for weeks. And, of course, towards the end, men began dropping off because of this story about the ghost-child that appeared directly it grew dark. . . . Oh, I can't remember everything in detail, but really, one could scarcely blame the man for getting almost crazy with worry and anxiety as to whether he would ever get the thing really finished. But to blame it on deliberate action by the Devil . . . well!' The Dean laughed deprecatingly as he stirred his coffee. 'Of course, that was frankly childish, as I told him . . . and he didn't like that at all, poor man; he lost his temper and said most regrettable things. In these days one doesn't accept the medieval Devil, horns and hoofs and tail, who deliberately sets out to prevent the building of a church.'

"I suppressed the answer I had in mind to make—that if the Dean had had the personal experiences of Evil that I had had, he might not talk quite so confidently!

"'Quite,' I said. 'But don't you see that that idea, in the mind of a man already anxious, worried, highly-strung—on the

—then we were inside the vestry and the Dean began with trembling fingers to don surplice and stole in preparation for his part in the drama we were about to play together.

“I suppose that is rather an irreverent phrase to use—but it was true. I had coached the little man carefully in his rôle; I knew that only he could play it. For all my knowledge and training, there are things only an ordained priest could do, and I was a layman; and when at last the little man stood ready, wearing his snowy surplice above his long black cassock, the rich Roman-purple of the stole cutting a stripe of lively colour down each side of the surplice, and the black biretta crowning his thick white hair, he attained suddenly a presence so impressive and dignified that I thought how true was the old saying that the apparel makes the man . . . yet there was more to my little priest than mere brave attire. I came close to him and took his hands in mine. They were cold and rather shaky, but his blue eyes met mine courageously as I spoke.

“‘Sir, I hope you don’t think I don’t appreciate this that you have undertaken to do—I honour and admire you for it more than I can say! I’ve only got one thing to ask you—whatever you may see or hear to-night, *don’t give way!* Go through with the rite to the end. You say you have only occasionally heard or felt . . . something. But to-night, because I am here—and I shall be concentrating all my psychic strength on you, to help you to do what only a fully-ordained priest *can* do—you may also, for the moment, see what *I* see! If—then—you give way, through fear or shock, as your Bishop did, then all this effort that we are putting forward will be wasted, and this thing that we are trying to cure may even be intensified. These two souls so pitifully earthbound may be bound here for ever. . . .’

“He nodded.

“‘I understand—and as far as it lies in the power of a weak man to undertake to follow through a thing to the end, Mr. Penoyer, I give you that undertaking, for the sake of the good we are both trying to do. And may God prosper us!’

“‘Amen to that,’ I said. ‘Now, are you ready? It is close on midnight. Give me time to get into my place—and then come.’

“Drawing a long breath, he nodded again—and I left him and hastily took up my accustomed place in the body of the Cathedral.

“My heart was beating with excitement as I settled back

against the hard wooden back of the pew and fixed my eyes upon the scene now so familiar—the seven marble steps up to the altar with its clustered lilies and shining brasses; the giant golden Crucifix in the centre, the gorgeous reredos and the painted windows behind, and against them, like serpents' eyes, the seven crimson-lighted lamps hanging motionless in the incense-heavy air. As I watched I saw the little figure of the priest emerge slowly from the side approach to the altar, and kneeling before it, bow low in prayer . . . and even as I watched it, I was conscious of that familiar tensility swelling in the atmosphere about me, flaming upwards, like a fire just lighted, as though the appearance of that little figure possessed a significance far deeper than I had realized . . . and suddenly they were there! That now-familiar vibration all about me told me so even before I saw them, or rather him. For, as always, the man appeared before the child. . . .

"He stood, as usual, half-way up the steps before the altar—staring up at it, and his back was towards me, so I could not see his face as he watched with a queer kind of hungry intensity the figure of the Dean, now risen from his knees, moving quietly about the altar preparing for what he had to do—and from where I sat I sensed that intensity with a sharpness almost painful. I knew how a prisoner, held fast behind bars, might watch someone who, outside that prison, showed him the key. . . .

"The Dean turned, and I heard his sharp-drawn breath and knew that he saw even as I saw. More clearly indeed, since he saw the man's face, and for a moment I caught my own breath, wondering what effect the sight was going to have on him . . . but I need not have feared. There was sterling stuff in the little priest, and after a moment I heard his voice, quavering at first, but gathering strength as he spoke, ringing out in the silence.

"'Walter Gregg Hart, is it you that I see standing there?'

"The figure bent its head in assent, and I felt that wild and bitter tide of emotion well about me like a swelling tide—shame, anguish and, above all, bitter, bitter repentance surged about me, and above it the Dean's voice rose again.

"'Is that which I fear true—that you have stained your hands, your hands that built this holy place, with blood?'

"Again the shadowy figure bent its head, and the utter wretchedness of its pose brought stinging tears to my eye. I wiped them hastily away as the priest went on.

"'Do you haunt this place because of your sorrow for that

most dreadful sin, and do you with your whole heart and being repent?'

"For the third time the figure nodded—and the Dean drew a deep breath and went on.

"Then, Walter Gregg Hart, I call upon the spirit of the child who died at your hands, and who also haunts this place because of the fear and suffering you caused her, to come now, and grant you her forgiveness, if she will, in the Name of the Child who died for her and for you and for all sinners!'

"I sat sharply upright in my place—for even as he spoke, there she stood, close to his side! One small hand, it seemed, catching the fringe of his purple stole, shrinking against him as for protection, her eyes fixed on that dark, despairing figure that stood with hanging head half-way up the steps below the altar—unable to approach nearer the holy place.

"That faint phosphorescent light still shone about her, and seemed, as she stood close to the Dean, to be brighter than usual—or else my sight was momentarily sharpened, for I saw a pinched little face with wide, scared dark eyes under the tangle of shaggy hair. Eyes that stared at the figure of the man, and stared and stared . . . when suddenly he fell upon his knees and stretched out both arms to her in a gesture most piteous to see, a gesture of agonized supplication, a gesture that was at once a prayer and an appeal. As though in accord with this action, the tensivity of the atmosphere pulsating about me deepened and strengthened until I shook all over with the mighty force of the vibrations, clinging to my balance and sanity with an effort that cost me almost more strength than I could summon up . . . and then even as I caught my breath and brushed the perspiration out of my eyes, I saw the miracle happen! The thin little hand of the child reached up and touched the hand of the Dean! And—all honour to my little priest, though, he told me afterwards, it came as a terrific shock, that sudden chill touch like an icy wind, and he scarcely blamed his Bishop for fainting!—when he looked down and saw what stood at his side his pity and his longing to help rose stronger than his fear. For she was smiling up at him shyly, faintly, and as he looked down she pointed first to the kneeling shape that had once been a man, and then to the Cross above the altar.

"Walter Gregg Hart,' said the Dean—and his voice quavered like a leaf in a wind, and I did not wonder. I, too, was almost at the end of my tether, for the whirlpool of emotion that had

shaken me each night in this place had been nothing to the terrific intensity of that which I was passing through to-night. 'Be thankful in your soul, and bow yourself with gratitude! The child you murdered grants you her forgiveness—and on your sincere repentance I herewith grant you the pardon of the Church. Down on your knees, and greet it humbly!'

"The little man seemed somehow to grow immense, the whole Cathedral shook and throbbed about me like the beating of a great heart, and my dazed eyes seemed to see the childish shadow that still stood shyly clinging to the Dean's side shine out suddenly into a blinding Glory above a dark shape bowed in humility—and high above the uproar and tumult in my ears I heard the great words of the Exorcism ring out.

"... *Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences! And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost! Amen.* ...

"There was a mighty flash like a blaze of summer lightning as the Dean made the Sign of the Cross, and as he made it I saw that which is so rarely seen by man—the Sign itself remaining, hanging in the air, as it were, in pure white brilliance, for the space of a breath! Then as it vanished the whole world seemed to shake and split into a thousand pieces that went spinning round my head to the accompaniment of a terrific roaring like that of some colossal waterfall, and the last thing I knew before I lost consciousness was that above all the tumult I seemed to hear a distant sound, faint but glorious, of singing, high and triumphant, as though in welcome. And a childish voice was leading it. As I sank away into the darkness the words 'there is more rejoicing over one sinner that repenteth' flashed across my mind. ...

"After a long time, it seemed, I came back into myself, and I found I was huddled in a heap in the corner of my pew, and that the Dean was kneeling in prayer before the altar. When I went up to him, he rose, trembling, and all but collapsed in my arms. Poor brave little man—he had done wonders! But he was so nervously shattered that he was almost weeping, and I had great difficulty in getting him home at last, he was so shaky at the knees—and then I was obliged to sit beside him for quite an hour before I could get him off to sleep. He had been amazingly

plucky, carried things through, as I had begged him, to their ultimate end, and freed not only those two poor earthbound souls, but his beloved Cathedral, from bondage. So it was well worth it—for since then the two figures, with the dreadful atmosphere of suffering they brought with them, have never been seen again."

There was a long pause. I was more moved than I dared to admit.

"That," I said at last, "is a thundering good story! But I want to know various other things. Obviously Hart murdered the child—but why and how and when?"

"As regards the *how*, I can't tell you," said Pennoyer. "But after the Exorcism was over, the Dean got permission to take up one of the flagstones at the corner of the altar—where she always appeared first—and found what I told him he would find. The remains of a child. A little girl, dressed in a ragged scarlet frock. She was buried reverently in a corner of Nant churchyard—and it is obvious that Hart, driven mad by the constant hindrances and hitches to the building of the Cathedral, conceived the awful idea that only a human sacrifice would appease whatever Force he imagined was opposing him, and murdered her, poor little soul. I suppose he lured her into coming there one night by a promise of sweets or money, killed her somehow—strangulation, I imagine—and buried her there. Brrh! It's an ugly story. Only hinted at in the diary—but I pieced it together."

"But *why*?" I persisted. "What was the idea?"

"Oh," said Pennoyer. "It's an old superstition, you know, that a living thing *must* be buried under any building as a sort of sacrifice to the gods of the earth. You often find bones . . . animal generally, but sometimes human . . . under the centre-posts or hearthstones of old buildings. And the practice is by no means entirely dead even to-day—it still exists in certain parts of the world."

"I suppose," I said, "Hart's obsession that he was being deliberately hindered by the Devil worked on the man to such an extent that he lost his mental balance."

Pennoyer nodded.

"That's right," he said. "He was always a man of very violent temper, and the set-backs consequent upon the building of the Cathedral fairly drove him mad with rage. You see, the whole of that tragic story expressed in emotions was still living and vital in that infernal symphony of vibrations that came with them—I picked up the 'echoes' of those earlier moods of his,

as well as the later. I think this child was probably a 'stray' belonging to some gipsies who used to wander through here occasionally—she looked a gipsy type, black-haired and lean and ragged. There you have the element of fear and shrinking—the child's part in that awful symphony—and the later reaction also of poor Hart, when he realized what he had done . . . shame and horror, guilt and a desperate anguish of repentance! Obviously he committed suicide because of what he had done. I should not be surprised if he himself saw the child—there are one or two cryptic remarks that read as though he did, in the latter part of the diary. But equally obviously, once out of the body, with his mind no longer clouded by semi-madness, he realized to the full his awful sin, and could not leave this place until he had received forgiveness both from the child he had murdered, and from the Church he had defiled."

"What about the phosphorescent effect that you got with the child?" I said. "And why didn't you get it with the man as well?"

Pennoyer laughed.

"There are questions that even a fairly-experienced psychic such as myself can't answer with *absolute* assurance," he said. "But I imagine that the real answer would have something to do with the child's essential innocence that expressed itself thus—as opposed to the man's older, more darkened spirit. I believe poor Hart had led a pretty ragged sort of moral life, while she had died—been killed—while her aura was still pure, untouched. At least, that is the only answer I can give you."

I was silent for a moment.

"There's another thing too," I said at last. "Now at the end, when the Dean gave the absolution, apparently it was *you* who passed out in a faint, while he didn't. You said that when you came to he was kneeling in prayer at the altar. He was shaken, but that was all . . . and you had collapsed! With your experience and powers that surprised me. I should have thought you were the tougher of the two."

"My dear Jerry," said Pennoyer with a wry smile. "There are limits to the physical strength and endurance of the most highly-trained practitioner of any art! And don't you realize that sitting there in the Church, apparently taking no active part in the whole affair, I had actually been providing, so to speak, the blood—the psychic force and the strength—needed by the little Dean to get through the whole thing? He was amazingly plucky

—and if he had not been so brave he would have failed! But sitting there quietly in the body of the Church, out of the lime-light, so to speak, *I* was providing the main strength on which he was depending. And further, I saw what he didn't at the finish—I saw the *proof* that Hart was pardoned. I saw the visible Cross of Light Itself, hanging in the air—and that is an experience that will temporarily knock out most psychics. The intense power, the almost terrible purity of it . . . well, there you have your explanation."

He rose as a signal that the evening was over, and reluctantly I rose too, and shook out my unsmoked pipe.

"Pen," I said, "you are a queer chap—and a rather wonderful one."

Pennoyer shook his head.

"I'm only using gifts that all of us possess in a greater or lesser degree," he said. "And believe me, often it is a curse to possess 'em in a really highly-trained and developed form! Many is the night's sleep I've lost not only in going through these experiences, but in thinking of them afterwards. . . . Psychic work takes it out of you to a terrific extent, and however well you may train your courage, there are sights and sounds that shake it to the core and leave you as weak and shaky as a kitten." He laughed. "Never mind! It's all in the day's work—and I wouldn't be doing anything else for anything in the world! Bless you—good night."

3

THE CASE OF ELLA McLEOD

"IT'S ODD TO THINK OF ME at a house-party," said Pennoyer meditatively. "And yet it was at a house-party—at a fashionable house-party too—that I struck one of the most interesting experiences I've ever had."

"A patient?" I queried.

Pennoyer shook his head. His beautiful green-hazel eyes, those eyes that were like lamps in his odd, dark face, were retrospective—they had the look in them that I had so often seen; the look of one who sees through the ugly, foolish things of every day, the pitiful, shameful side of humanity, through to the further side, where the good, the beautiful and the true shine forth as an abiding vision.

He shook his head again, and played idly with his *kombologia*, that rosary-like string of beads used in Greece to give men who do not wish to smoke too much something to play with, to take their minds off the lack of a cigarette. Pennoyer had learnt to use it while he was training himself to give up smoking, and it had become a habit; the lovely string of amber beads with its swinging tassel was constantly in his hands, bead after bead slipping along between his lean, nervous fingers as though he sat telling a secret rosary—and indeed for all I know he might have been. But it would not be the prayers of the Roman Catholic Church those beads would have been telling! Like most men who had studied with the Masters, Pennoyer knew too much of the inner truth that lies hidden behind all religions to be able to belong to one of them.

I poured out a long drink of ice-cold lager—old Friedl understood as only her kind do how to look after men, and though Pennoyer did not drink himself there was never any lack of drinks or smokes for his friends.

"Go on, Pen—there's a story behind that casual remark of yours about the house-party," I said. "Spit it out! Was it another case?"

"Not precisely," said Pennoyer.

He rose, and slipping his shining yellow beads into his pocket,

walked across the room, extracted a white card from a pile of letters and threw it over to me.

I regarded the card with interest, but without surprise. Pennoyer was continually being besieged by society women anxious to lionize him. His reputation as a psychic doctor labelled him at once as "odd" and "thrilling" and "queer"—and besides that, he was reputed well-to-do, and despite the plainness of his lean expressive face and loose-hung figure, attractive enough.

"Lady Angus. At Home. 18 Monk Street, Mayfair. May 20. Sherry, cocktails, snacks. . . ."

I laughed. "Who's this, Pen? You generally avoid society queens like the plague!"

"I know," he said. "And I keep on trying to avoid this one! But because once, and once only (that time I'm going to tell you about), I went to stay with her at her husband's place in Scotland she won't take no for an answer! Though she'll have to—I shall not go, of course."

"But what made you go and stay with her in the first place?" I asked curiously.

"Oh, that was quite different," said Pennoyer quickly. "Her husband Angus—now *he's* a fine chap—used to be a great friend of mine. I often used to go and spend a week or so at his place in Scotland when I wanted a breath of clean mountain air. I didn't shoot or fish, but he liked me and I him, and he had some intelligent men-friends—and then the poor fool must needs go off to America yachting and run into this damned woman and marry her! She was an American widow—bags of money and reputed a beauty—and he asked me to go up to Tarroch and meet her soon after they got back to England. Like a fool I accepted, thinking it'd be like old times—and I found myself on arrival pitchforked into a chattering crowd of socialites! The sort of party I hate and avoid like the plague."

I grinned.

"You must have been a little ray of sunshine to 'em!" I commented.

Pennoyer laughed.

"I did my best," he said resignedly. "Couldn't invent an excuse to dash off again at once, of course—and besides, old Angus was so pathetically pleased to see me that I hadn't the heart to desert him at once. I soon saw he was as much out of his element as I was—why he married her I can't think. But that's another story. Well, I got several shocks directly I went

in. The lovely old lounge-hall, that used to be so cosy, with its huge fireplace and deep chairs and antlered heads on the walls, had been modernized until it was barely recognizable! The whole place was cluttered with glass-and-steel furniture, Marion Dorn rugs instead of the old sheepskins before the fires, hangings patterned like Gauguin pictures instead of the cosy old dark-green velvet, and bowls of horrible gaudy flowers made of painted metal or wood or wire instead of the great tufts of gorse or heather that used to stand about scenting the whole place. . . . Lord, you've no idea how horrible it was! "

He made a grimace of disgust so profound that I grinned afresh.

"And the people were more horrible still! Hungry-looking women in French versions of country clothes, with powder and rouge laid on thick enough to startle the birds every time they went to the butts—and the men either paunchy-and-City or pallid stringy Americans in the most frightful plus-fours, with a sprinkling of aggressively bouncing youngsters of both sexes . . . "

"Go on," I said, producing my notebooks with a resigned air. "I'm all set for taking dictation! Get it off your chest! "

I wouldn't have stayed more than a couple of days (Pennoyer said) if it hadn't been for poor old Angus! He and I went about as much as possible together, but his damn new wife wasn't going to let me have too much of him—she didn't like me overmuch when she saw her pearls and figure and Elizabeth-Arden complexion didn't make the effect she'd hoped. Good-looking—oh, yes—in a brittle, flashy modern way, but hard as nails. Tragic that a fine, simple, honest chap like Angus should have been caught by a cold-blooded, mean little social climber like that . . . all she ever wanted was his title, of course.

Well, the days dragged on until I'd been there a week, and I was frankly bored to death. Dropped a hint to Angus about leaving, and he begged me not to go, so I weakened and stayed on. Used to wander about a good deal alone, of course—I knew the country around pretty thoroughly. It was certainly a lovely place—an old house with rambling, half-wild grounds, perched high up on the hills above Loch Tarroch, one of the loveliest lochs it's ever been my privilege to see. And I know Scotland well! Angus has quite a big place there—the estate runs right down to the brink of the cliffs that overhang Loch Tarroch at its northernmost end. Tarroch is one of those long, narrow lochs

that lies between a rampart of mountains each side—a rampart that rises high at the northern end but slopes down to the southern, where a river called the Tarroch runs out from the loch and goes winding away through Glen Muruisk, a lovely green valley. But at the northern end of the loch the land suddenly rises high and austere, and sheer black cliffs are reflected in the dark waters below—and beyond is wild, high mountainous country, miles of heatherclad moorland, with huge grey granite peaks and ridges shouldering up out of the purple, and here and there, where the windswept land dipped into folds and gullies that gave a hint of shelter, a stray village or a deep green glen; a wonderful country, if a rather awe-inspiring one!

The grounds of Tarroch House were pretty wild, and it was difficult to tell sometimes where the grounds ended and the moorland began. There was a little country road winding northward across the hills towards Cortinchy, a village fifteen miles distant, and from the front of the house a newly-built drive—so new that the staring white of it shone like a scar. That damn woman's money again!—swept out to join the main road, that ran southwards down the side of the loch through Glen Muruisk and the little post-town, Glenaller. Those were the only roads in the district except a sheep-path or two. One of the things I had always liked about Tarroch was the opportunity it gave me for solitary walks, and fortunately these I could still take, since needless to say Lady Angus and her crowd of townbred friends were not given to walking!

As of old, I had the moors and the purple heather and the distant line of mountains to myself . . . or almost. But now and again I ran into a tall, gaunt woman of, say, thirty-eight or forty, striding along alone, with her hands stuck into the pockets of her ulster and a battered felt hat of no particular shape pulled down on her head. Once or twice I saw her, and remarked her merely because it was so rare to see anybody on my wanderings besides a chance shepherd—and besides, there was something about the tall, lank figure, the high-cheek-boned face with the strands of ragged reddish hair blowing across it, that caught my attention oddly for a moment or two. Why, I didn't know, but I put the impression away for further reference—as you know, so often those impressions mean something quite definite, only one doesn't realize their meaning at the moment.

Twice I saw her—put her down as a stray visitor staying at Cortinchy—but the third time I overtook her making for the back

entrance of the house and realized that she belonged to Tarroch. I'd climbed over the crumbling wall and was going in via the back way myself, since if I had gone in via the front entrance I should have walked into the pre-dinner cocktail party that went on every night, and I was bored to death with trying to explain why I didn't drink! If I could sneak up, dress and come down just as the gong went I would be spared all that. I overtook the strange woman just as she was going in—evidently she was one of the servants. She heard my step and stood back to let me go in first, with the detached air of the well-trained maid, and I pulled off my cap.

"Fellow tramps, eh?" I said. "We seem to be the only people who like walking in this house!"

She smiled, again the non-committal smile of the well-trained servant, and I went on into the house.

But during dinner, for want of something better to say, I mentioned the fact that I'd seen her. Angus's wife looked up from the *vol-au-vent* she was eating—I remember she was a blaze of white satin and diamonds, and I thought irritably how unsuitable it was for dinner in a bleak Scottish manor-house in the Highlands!—and spoke at once.

"Oh, that would be Ella McLeod, my maid."

"Your maid?"

I looked at her, astonished, mentally setting her beside the long, gaunt woman with the high cheek-bones and the coarse rusty hair blowing across them. The contrast was too odd! One would have imagined the typical French Mademoiselle, demurely aproned and silk-stockinged, as the only creature suitable as waiting-maid for Sybil Angus, slick, trivial, artificial piece of modern womanhood! Lady Angus caught my expression and laughed.

"She's not the sort you'd expect anyone to have as a personal maid, is she?" she said, pecking at her *vol-au-vent* like a restless bird—none of that crowd of women ever ate a decent meal, they were too preoccupied with their figures! "But as a matter of fact she's a simply marvellous maid."

"After a Frenchwoman, a Scotchwoman makes the best maid in the world," said the woman on my left—a small, egg-faced blonde with a pair of deliberately innocent blue eyes over anything-but-innocent lips.

Lady Angus nodded.

"That's so," she said. "Ella's been with me for over four

years now—travelled all over the place—and I don't know what I would do without her."

"She must be a marvel if she's stayed with you for four years, darling," said the blonde sweetly.

But Lady Angus merely laughed again.

"I guess you're right," she assented. "I'm the world's worst person to live with—aren't I, sweetie pie?"

Luckily Angus wasn't listening—I happened to know he loathed being called love-names in public—and she went on.

"The reason is that Ella doesn't answer back! Now isn't a maid who answers back your pet hate? I lose my temper and shriek and throw things about—you know what I'm like. I can't help myself, and Ella simply says nothing, but picks up everything and waits until I've simmered down. Then I give her a frock or a hat and everything's O.K. I simply couldn't do without her now at any price."

The conversation turned to other things—but those few sentences stuck oddly in my mind.

"Ella McLeod!" The name sang like the ripple of a running tide, like the lilt of wind over purple heather—like the rhythmic stride of a long-limbed, ugly woman in a cheap, drab-coloured ulster, walking lonely along the skyline, or along the high ground above the loch, looking down to where it lay glimmering, two hundred feet below the lip of the heatherclad cliff. "Ella McLeod!" I rather thought I wanted to talk to Ella McLeod. And as chance would have it—though the older I grow the more sure I am that nothing happens by chance—I met her again the next day.

I went out for my usual tramp after lunch—the whole crowd used to go to sleep in the afternoon, and no wonder, after the lunches they used to eat. I took the path northwards across the moor, and after tramping four or five miles found that the land dipped suddenly downhill into a little rocky glen with a burn that ran trickling down the middle and a few scattered rowans growing amongst the boulders. The day was unexpectedly mild after a spell of rain, and in this little place, sheltered by a great outcrop of granite crags that made a perfect windbreak, it was warm and sheltered; so I shed my mac and sat down on it beside the stream for a breather.

I drank a mouthful or two of water—cold, delicious mountain water!—and sat there idly throwing pebbles or crumbs of earth into the brown running stream as it scrabbled over the pebbles

. . . when suddenly I heard a sound! A woman's voice talking. Cautiously I rose and peered about me, and in a minute or two I realized that the sound came from just behind a pile of boulders a few feet away downstream. It was a Scottish voice, low and musical, with the soft burr of the North in it.

"Och, lie still, will ye no? Lie still, and let's get a sight of the wee footie. . . ."

I peered round the boulders, and saw that the speaker was Ella McLeod. She was sitting crouched down beside a huge rough-haired dog, thin and starved-looking; its right forefoot was wrapped about with a soiled-looking bandage. At the sound of my movement she looked up, and I saw that her face was lined and dark with anxiety.

"It's Ella McLeod, Lady Angus's maid, isn't it?" I said. "I heard you. Is there anything I can do?"

The dog looked up at me with a pair of liquid treacle-brown eyes for a moment, then laid its head down against her knee with almost a palpable sigh. Her lip quivered—this was a different Ella McLeod from the stiffly correct, touch-me-not woman that, I remembered now, I had seen once or twice moving silently about the big house on her mistress's business!

"It's the dog, sir," she said. "He's hurt sair—and I've lost the bandage I bring every day to tie up his poor foot!" Her eyes brightened suddenly, hopefully. "Maybe you've a handkerchief you could be sparin', sir? I'd hae to tear it up to bind the hurrt for him, but I'd buy ye anither . . . if ye'd no' think it a leeberry?"

"On the contrary, I'd be thinking it a privilege," I said. "But anyway, you won't be needing my handkerchief—I've got a pocket first-aid outfit here, I always carry it. There's a bandage there, and lint and dressings as well."

"Och, but that's fine!"

Her eyes were starry as I produced the little box, and without waste of words she turned to her task, washed the injured foot—which was indeed badly damaged, a deep cut right across the centre pad—put antiseptic dressing and a fresh piece of lint upon it and bound the bandage in place, the animal lying all the time perfectly quiescent at her side. She sat back at last with a deep sigh of relief.

"Eh, but that'll be better, ma mannie, eh?"

The collie—for I saw now it was a handsome black-and-white collie, though sadly thin and starved—licked her hand and laid

its head again in her lap, and her face twisted with emotion that for all her Scottish reserve she could not entirely control.

"Och!" she burst out. "If only I cud tak' ye hame with me! Not leave ye here out in the cold and the rain—ye puir, puir beast, ye darlin' beastie."

She laid her head down beside the collie and literally crooned at it, and I'll swear it all but answered back! It was suddenly and powerfully moving to see them together there, the starved woman and the starved beast—for starved they surely were, each of them, in their own different ways—and I felt a lump come into my throat.

"Whose is it, Ella?" I asked gently.

She answered at once as openly as a child.

"I found him here a twa-three days back, all draggled and starvin' with his puir paw cut half-open, and naebody to tend him . . . the Lorr'd knows whaur he belongs. But"—her eyes dropped to the collie's again, raised to hers with a look of utter love and trust—"I ken fine that now he belongs to *me*!"

"It looks like it," I agreed. "But how . . ."

She interrupted me.

"Och, I know, sir! It's gettin' the mistress to let me hae him wi' me that's worryin' me. There's room enough in the big hoose and to spare, and I'd keep him fine and well out of her way. But there's her leddyship's Peke . . ."

She paused, her anxious eyes searching my face, and it struck me then that her eyes were twins to the collie's. Wide and brown as the peatwater in her native burns—beautiful, pitiful eyes set in that haggard face with its surround of rusty hair.

I nodded. I knew too, almost as well as she did, her ladyship's Peke! Horrible slobbery little brute with pop-eyes and a yap that frayed one's nerves. . . .

She rose to her feet with a swift twist of her long, lank body that was not without a curious angular grace.

"Look ye here, sir. I've done my best for the puir laddie—it's clean and it's dry at least. . . ."

It was a cave at the edge of the burn, little more than a cleft under the lee of the overhanging outcrop of rocks, but, as she said, clean and dry and sheltered from the winds, and thickly spread with bracken and pulled heather. A gnawed beef-bone and various other fragments scattered about proved that she had, indeed, done her best for him, including tramping something like five miles daily each way, rain or fine, to keep him supplied with

food and fresh dressing for his injured foot. . . . Knowing the hours she had to keep dancing attendance on Lady Angus, who never dreamt of going to bed before two or three o'clock in the morning, I felt my gorge rise as I stood in silence, looking down at the little den. She looked at me apologetically, thinking my silence meant contempt or disapproval.

"I know it's no' much of a place . . ." she began, troubled.

"On the contrary, I think you've done marvels!" I said. "But it's too absurd that you should have to tramp all this way day after day to look after a wounded dog when there's room for twenty wounded dogs at the house! I'll speak to Sir Angus about it."

Her eyes lit up with sudden excitement.

"Och, sir, wud ye do it?" In her excitement she was growing more and more Scotch. "But mind ye this—ask for yerself, sir, not for me! Say ye've found the dog hurrt on the moors, and gi'en to me to look after for ye—or till his owner's found! I ken fine his lorrdschip 'ull do anythin' ye ask—but it's different for me. I dursn't ask her leddyship for myself. Ye see, there's the Peke. . . ."

I did see. There was the Peke. But I also saw a love-starved woman quivering with hope, and a dog at her heels that looked up at me with the same hope in his eyes—and I was going to get those two together somehow, if I was damned for it!

I left them there, sitting almost literally hand in hand, and tramped away across the moor, thinking hard.

Well, I gained my point. It was easier than I'd expected, but Angus was anxious to persuade me to stop on, and Lady Angus, on my mentioning the point to her at dinner, as casually as I dared, merely laughed lightly and said there was plenty of room in the stables, of course, as long as the dog didn't come into the front of the house and annoy darling Pooti. . . .

I assured her that darling Pooti would be left alone in his accustomed possession of the front of the house, and left the crowd to their customary bridge while I wandered off, ostensibly to the library—my favourite haunt now, since Lady Angus had not included it in her modernization of the house—actually to try and locate Ella McLeod. I ran into her coming along the passage outside the library with her arms full of pink chiffon frilleries and whatnots—suppose she'd been doing some washing or ironing or something in the stillroom that I knew was along

there somewhere. She looked severe, almost unapproachable, in her uniform black-and-white, and her rusty hair that I had seen blowing wildly abroad was braided close about her head, leaving her harsh, strong-featured face almost starkly exposed between the hard white collar and the severe white cap. If I had not seen a very different Ella McLeod, I doubt whether I would ever have dared to approach her at all in her professional guise. As I came up to her she stood still and eyed me with the wooden expression of the perfect servant. "Icily regular, splendidly null. . . ."

I glanced about me hastily and dropped my voice as I spoke.

"It's all right, Ella. About the dog, I mean."

The mask of the perfect servant dropped, and the woman flashed out upon me, vivid, alert. She all but dropped her armful of chignons as she clutched at me.

"Och, it's not true! He's to come into the hoose, oot o' the rain, ma bonnie man? Eh, ye're guid! I dinna ken how to thank you, dochtor! Wud ye believe it, that yesterday after ye left I tried to leave him—and if I hadna tied him up in his wee cave, he'd hae followed me here all the way, wi' his sore paw and all!"

Her eyes were alight, her thin face flushed . . . and why was it that suddenly I saw not Ella McLeod, Lady Angus's middle-aged Scotch maid before me, but a tall girl, long-limbed, handsome, with ruddy hair tossing in the breeze, with only a leopard-skin bound about her lean, muscular white body, and with a great dog running at her side? And behind her flamed a background of sun and sky, and a tree-clad mountain slope that led down to a star-blue sea where a throng of laughing naked girls splashed and shouted as they waved to her. . . .

The vision was so strong that for a moment I lost sight, completely and utterly, of where I was, and when I came back to myself she was still talking . . . but she was Ella McLeod again, a gaunt, ugly, middle-aged woman who had found a wounded dog on a lonely hillside and wanted to keep it.

" . . . sae I must be going, sir, or her leddyship'll maybe wantin' me. But I shallna forget. And if there's ever anything I can do . . . "

The soft Scottish voice died away diffidently. I assured her that there was nothing that she could do—and that on the contrary the pleasure had been mine, and took myself off to the library in good earnest this time. But not to read. To meditate on two or three things that were puzzling me considerably. . . .

Well, I stayed on, much to Angus's delight. Lady Angus was pleased and flattered, as she knew my reputation for hating house-parties—and I'm ashamed to say that I even descended to playing up to her a little on one or two occasions, just to show the fools she had round her that her talk of me as "queer" and "thrilling" were not entirely without foundation.

But although they were thrilled they didn't like me any the better, since I'm afraid I took a malicious delight in doing two or three things that made them look supremely foolish. Such as making Sir Vivian Curtiss think the floor of the drawing-room was a tight-rope—you've no idea how comical he looked!—and "suggesting" to the blonde woman, Dolly Hopper, whom I particularly disliked, that the suit of armour standing in one corner of the hall (one of the few relics of the old *régime* that Lady Angus had left untouched) was her latest conquest! To see her ogling and talking to it was really funny—but more than a little uncanny, I'll admit, and I don't wonder that one or two of the women got scared. Oh yes—and I played that fat horror, Sir Julius Stein, up to the full. I "recalled" his grandfather, who used to run a *kosher* restaurant in Vienna—and the old gentleman took possession of his grandson and insisted on going down into the kitchen and cooking his own dinner, as he swore he wouldn't eat anything cooked by a damned Gentile. That was funny—especially as Sir Julius always tries so hard to pretend he hasn't a drop of Jewish blood in his fat carcass. I'm afraid it'll take him a long time to live that down. . . .

No, I didn't increase my popularity, but I certainly increased my prestige and Lady Angus's—and in consequence she joined Angus in urging me to stay on. I accepted—not because I wanted to see more of them, but because I wanted to see more of Ella McLeod. The woman intrigued me. That curious flash of vision that I had had when talking to her on the landing had come again once or twice, when I had a moment's casual conversation with her, but without leading me anywhere—and I wanted to check it up. To locate it, as it were . . . so I stayed on.

The collie came and was installed in a dry corner of the stables, and for the first few days Ella McLeod did not go for her usual tramp over the moor. I could imagine her spending her precious few hours of daily freedom crooning over her beloved dog in its new home, binding its paw, talking to it in that soft Scottish voice of hers—I would have gone and hunted her up, but I was afraid

to do her harm in the eyes of her fellow servants. Nothing brings suspicion and dislike so quickly upon a servant as a guest deliberately singling her out for favour. And despite the fact that I was no ladies' man and she was a plain woman of well over forty, yet she *was* a woman and I was a man, and for her sake I refrained—though I was sorely tempted to go round to the stables once or twice!

But my time came. About a week later I went out after lunch as usual and made my way across the moorland, spreading wide its purple and crimson carpet, broken here and there by outcrops of grim grey Scotch granite looking like fallen meteorites. It was a warm, bright day, much like the day on which I had found Ella McLeod in the little glen, and I flung myself down on the springy heather beside the path to Cortinchy and lay watching the gate that was the back entrance to the grounds. Yes, my luck was in! She came, hatless this time, and without that grimly drab mackintosh, and at her heels the great dog came bounding. . . .

In the distance they made a singularly graceful picture, for she moved as only a woman used to walking across wide untilled lands can move, with a free grand stride like a boy's, and released from the cramping trammels of her official black-and-white one could see, under the clinging stuff of her cheap green sweater and coarse tweed skirt, the lines, lean, square-shouldered and narrow-hipped, of a body that would not have disgraced an Amazon of old. . . . I started. Why did that simile come into my mind so aptly? Did it hang upon that vision that I had had of her, young and free-striding, magnificently confident, set against a background of forest and sand and sea?

She saw me as she came onwards, and her plain sallow face broke into a shy smile of welcome. The dog bounded up to me and licked my face, and she sank down beside me upon the heather. We were out of sight of the house-windows—and nobody on the staff but Ella McLeod ever walked across the moors. For a little while we were free. . . .

"He's fine now—just look at yon!" She nodded at him as he stretched himself at our feet, his red tongue hanging out of his mouth as he panted after his run. "Are ye no' glad you helpit him, dochtor?"

"I'm glad if I helped *you*," I said bluntly.

Her face clouded and she bit her lip. Her lean strong hands, hardened with work, played nervously with the heather twigs.

"Och—maybe yes and maybe no. I'm in a fine pickle

over what to do with him—when her leddyship goes back to London.”

“Oh,” I considered. That contingency hadn’t struck me. “I see. Of course you can’t take him back with you, I suppose?”

She lifted contemptuous shoulders. “Is’t likely? I’m no complainin’, mind ye—her leddyship’s a good eno’ mistress as mistresses go. And I’m not denying that a great dog like yon whiles might be deefficult in a London hoose—though it’s a big hoose, the Lorrd knows.” Her eyes sized me up hopefully, furtively. “I suppose it wouldna be conceivable, sir, that you’d tak’ him yourself?”

“I’d love to, Ella,” I said truthfully. “But I’ve got my own dog already—and you know I couldn’t have another. It wouldn’t be fair.”

“Ou ay.” She considered me thoughtfully. “You’re richt. If ye’ve a dog o’ your ain, it wouldn’t be fair. They’re human, that’s what they are, and it ’ud break your ain beastie’s hairrt.” She caressed the dog’s silky ears with gentle fingers. “But if I have to leave mine here I’m thinking it’ll break *my* hairrt.”

“You couldn’t keep him at a friend’s?” I suggested. “Or maybe your own people . . .”

She shrugged again.

“I’ve nae folk. Been earnin’ my own leevin’ this thirrtty years, up the wurld and down again—it’s eighteen years since I saw Scotland, till this season, when I cam’ up wi’ her leddyship. She pays me well eno’, but I got to save for when I willna be able to wurrk as I do now—and wi’ insurance and claes and all, how could I pay for a poor doggie’s housing unless he housed wi’ me?”

“I thought her ladyship gave you a good many clothes?” I ventured.

She gave the ghost of a laugh.

“Claes? Och, by nows and thens a han’fu’ of chiffon or lace, or maybe a pink satin gown she’s done wi’, or an orange-coloured negligay or some such clamjamfry. And what’ll I do wi’ such things, but sell ’em or gie ’em away, eh? Me wear pink satin or orange chiffon! If instead of such her leddyship ’ud give me a bit extra cash, or mebbe a length o’ tweed, or the wool to knit a jumper—but there, the gentry don’t think o’ these things.”

She stood up, a gaunt, ugly woman, lean as a clothes-horse against the sunset, and the dog rose too; she smiled down at me, and her smile was very sweet.

"Weel, I must een gang ma way, sir, an' hope for the best! Come, Phryxos!"

I stared at her, suddenly arrested.

"Tell me," I said, "why did you call your dog Phryxos? It isn't a Scottish name—it's a Greek name!"

"Is it?" She looked vague. "Och—I dinna ken—I juist felt he *was* Phryxos. People's names belong . . ." She paused, and screwing up her eyes, stared southward into the distance where the moor swept down to the lip of the cliff that overhung Loch Tarroch. "Or they dinna belong. Ella, for instance . . . it hasna ever belonged tae *me*!"

I rose too, eagerly—for here was something I wanted to pin down. But she was already moving away. . . .

"Ella!" I called after her urgently. "Ella! Tell me—*what name belongs to you?*"

Her voice came back laughing over her shoulder—a voice oddly and triumphantly young.

"Helle! Helle . . ."

That was the last time I ever saw Ella McLeod happy, for things moved on swiftly after that interview to their end . . . appointed perhaps . . . I don't know. It was a conversation between Angus and his wife that enlightened me as to the next stage in the tragic story—a conversation overheard by accident as I was descending the stairs and they were standing beside the fire in the great hall waiting for the announcement of dinner. I heard her voice first.

"The most annoying thing I *ever* knew! I think Ella must have gone quite crazy! If we were in the South instead of this dreary country I'd say she had a touch of the sun. . . ."

"But why?"

She made a sound of profound vexation.

"Tcha! You know that dog that Pennoyer man found on the moors and brought back here? God knows why I let him do it, and aren't I sorry now! Ella's been looking after it—it had a damaged foot or something—and now she's got so fond of it that she doesn't want to leave it behind when we go South next week."

I heard a movement—evidently Angus was fidgeting uncomfortably—and shamelessly I paused for a moment to hear further.

"Er—of course she's a Scot, and it's a Scotch collie." Angus's laugh came awkwardly—evidently he was trying to conciliate the woman and not very sure that he was succeeding! "Like calling

to like, I s'pose . . . of course there *is* lots of room in the house in London, really, Lee? He could be kept in the basement . . . and there's the Square gardens for him to run in, and she could take him in the parks on her afternoons off. I dare say she's a bit of a lonely soul."

Good old Angus, doing his blundering best! But as well appeal to Cleopatra's Needle as to that hard-faced vixen he married. Her voice came again, sharp with annoyance.

"*Really*, Angus, what *are* you suggesting? Have another dog, and a great clumsy lout of a creature like that, in the same house with Pooti?"

There was a pause. Evidently Angus did not like to say what he thought of Pooti! The voice went on, aggrieved.

"And as for letting him go in the Square gardens—why, Pooti goes there for his runs, and do you think I'd let that creature go near him? Besides, it's a question of principle." Her voice took on a flavour of virtuousness. "I disapprove of the idea entirely. Servants having pets . . ."

"Ella hasn't asked for much, as far as I know, since she's been with you!"

There was an edge to Angus's voice, and because of it her retort was instant and venomous.

"And I'm not going to have her beginning now! She's well-paid and comfortable—what's she want now, suddenly starting this absurd idea? And for you to side with her! Really, you British are too soft for words with your servants! I won't have that damn dog in London, and that's flat."

I heard a step along the corridor above me, and resumed my descent of the stairs. But my heart was heavy, for somehow I felt that the separation of Ella from her dog was something deeper, more significant, even than I dreamed. Ella and Phryxos—no, didn't I mean Helle and Phryxos—had they not always been together?

I met her soon afterwards—that very evening, in fact. The crowd below stairs had settled down to their usual bridge, and I had fled to the library with Angus. But after half an hour Lady Angus had come as usual and raked him out with a sweetly acid remark that *really* he must come and help her manage the crowd . . . as though he had ever wanted the crowd, poor old man, who were all of her own choice and inviting! But there was nothing for him to do but go, and I was sitting reading by the fire when Ella came in hurriedly, furtively, without the prim

knock that preceded her usual conventional entrance.

Her face was ravaged with tears, her brown peatwater eyes held an expression of woe so profound that I was startled and sat up sharply. She came over to me and clutched me by the shoulder, half shaking it—in her passion of distress she was no longer Lady Angus's maid and I one of the guests in Lady Angus's house. She was a woman in dire anguish and I the only person who might help her. . . .

"She willna hae him, for all I promised faithful tae keep him out of her way and that God-damned Pooti's! "

Her voice shook with grief, and suddenly she sank to the floor at my feet, and laying her head in its neatly severe white cap against the leather arm of my chair, wept as though her heart were breaking.

"Och, sir, I canna do it! I canna leave him! What's ailing me I dinna ken—I've had dogs to do with before a many times, but never a dog like yon! It—it's no *like* a dog, and I'm verra sure this luv I hae for him and he for me, bless him, is no' the ordinary luv of man for his dog. . . ."

She raised a wracked face to mine and I patted her heaving shoulder. What could I say? Even better than I she knew the implacable narrow-mindedness of the woman for whom she was working—that mentality of the petty bully who would refuse a request that could perfectly easily be granted, simply "on principle"! In other words, for the mean joy of refusing. . . .

"I'm terribly sorry, Ella," I said lamely. "Frankly, I'd speak to Sir Angus if I felt it would be any good. But I'm afraid . . ."

She shook her head. Her cap had fallen off in her grief, and the thick, rusty-coloured hair was ruffled—she looked younger, less forbidding as she crouched thus forlornly at my feet, and the Vision, as I mentally called it, slid suddenly across my eyes again.

A girl, long-limbed and ruddy-haired, sitting sobbing in a grove of great pine trees, her face in her hands, her white shoulders, bound with the leopard-skin, ashake in the wildness of her weeping. . . . The picture was so strong that I could actually smell the scent of the pine-needles drawn out by the strong sunlight, and see, between the ruddy trunks of the pines, the gleam of sea-blue in the distance as Helle wept for her beloved hound, astray since yesterday, when she and her companions went hunting in the green depths of the forest. But even as I looked, there came a quick patter of feet through the undergrowth, the weeping girl

looked up as a great shaggy form literally flung itself into her arms, and to the accompaniment of her shriek of joy the vision flickered, shifted and vanished—and I was staring at Ella McLeod sitting on the floor at my feet! But beside her was Phryxos, held tightly in her arms, the half-open door behind showing where he had stolen in. Hastily I rose and shut the door close, and turned again to the pitiful two beside the fire.

"My God, I'm sorry!" I said. "Honestly, I don't know what to say, Ella!"

I was talking rather confusedly, my mind was still in a whirl, but she was too preoccupied to notice.

"It's not that I'd mind if it were a wee London flat," she said, feverishly caressing the shaggy head on her shoulder. "At least—I'd *mind*, but there 'ud be some sense tae the wumman's refusal! But when there's a hoose big as a barracks, and a yard at the back, and a basement where the puir laddie could bide wi'oot hurting a soul. . . ."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

She shook her head gloomily.

"What *can* I do? I tell ye, I hae naething but what I earn—and I canna leave her in a pet, for she might turn and give me a bad reference, and I canna afford that. Ou ay, she'd do that. She's that sort of a wumman."

Odd, I reflected, that it did not strike me as either wrong or even surprising that Lady Angus's maid should be discussing her with me in this way—yet it did not. Ella—or was it Helle?—met me on some strange plane that was above and apart from ordinary conventions . . . indeed from any ordinary aspect at all.

Slowly she rose to her feet and smoothed her crumpled apron, and standing before the mirror above the mantelpiece she pushed back her hair and fixed that hideous white cap on her head. As she stared at herself in the mirror she laughed oddly, and I glanced at her quickly.

"What do you see—*Helle*?"

I spoke in a whisper, for I had caught that look in her eyes that is only shown by those touched, as the poetic Celt says, by the finger of the Dark Fool, the Amadan Dhu. She stood still, her eyes fixed on the mirror that gave back her primly correct reflection—but I knew that she did not see that reflection at all. She saw—further! Back into a past lit with sunshine and freedom and laughter, back into the days when the world was young

and happy; the days before the leprosy of cities and civilizations had crept like a spreading sore over the green lands, before love had become twisted so that one could not know it from sin, and worship was not confined to churches, nor gods to a single night-gowned potentate who, from a chilly Heaven where he sits surrounded by bearded saints twangling eternally on gilded harps, dispenses grim justice and retribution instead of the gaiety and the laughter of the old pagan gods whom he has dispossessed. . . .

"What do you see—Helle?" I repeated softly.

She answered me at once, her eyes fixed, tranced, and behind her the dog Phryxos leapt into the deep leather armchair that faced me on the further side of the hearth, reared on his hind legs, and placing his paws on her shoulder, seemed to stare with her into the gleaming depths of the mirror. She put her hands over his great paws as they rested on her shoulders and answered me, and her voice was no longer the voice of Ella McLeod. It was the voice of a young girl—warm, vibrant, thrilling. . . .

"I see myself—as I have always seen myself in dreams! Not here—but in a different place altogether. And yet—it is something like! There are mountains—but they are purple and rose and deepest blue and green, and olive-coloured and grey. Oh, mountains of dream! And there is a forest that runs down to a seashore; a great green forest of pines and firs that smell sweet as incense, where one can sleep during the heat of the day . . . and the sea is blue as a piece of turquoise, and the sky too, and where the little waves break on the yellow sand there is a line of gleaming foam. . . ."

She drew a long breath and tilted her head back until it lay against the collie's broad black-and-white breast. And her voice rose like a song.

"I see myself running from the forest, and Phryxos is at my heels! And there below me, on the shore and in the sea are my comrades who wave and call to me. . . ."

"*Afiknoumen! Afiknoumai!*"¹

The shrill cry rang through the silent room like a clarion call, and in the flash of a split second Ella the maid stood looking at me, dazed, shaking, passing a scared hand across her brow.

"Och, that was a skelloch—fit to wake the deid! And what for did I cry out like that, now? Come on, Phryx, quickly, before her leddyship hears—come *on!*"

¹ "We are coming! I am coming!"

She was pulling at his collar, her eyes alight with fear. I went and held the door open for her. There was nothing I could say or do—poor girl! She must work out her own salvation—I could not help. She glanced up at me gratefully as she fled through the door, half-pulling, half-pushing the dog with her, and I watched her scurry down the passage and turn the corner that led into the kitchen regions with an ache at my heart. Poor girl—poor dog! But what was there to do?

Yet the thought of her tugged at my heart and made this little trivial group of cocktail-drinking, card-playing, scandal-talking fools so utterly contemptible that when I saw them well settled to their usual evening's amusement, bridge, I excused myself on the plea of having letters to write, and drawing Angus aside, told him I was going out for a tramp—in case I came in late would he leave the little side-door open for me, as he had so often done before. He nodded—he knew my liking for an occasional evening prowling—and in this remote part of the country there was no danger of thieves breaking into an unlocked door. For the excellent reason that there were no thieves to break in!

I sneaked upstairs, changed my dinner-jacket for tweeds and an ancient mackintosh, put on a pair of thick walking shoes, collared a stick, and sneaked out via the side-door aforesaid. It was a cool night with a hint of rain in the air, and the sky cold violet-blue with ink-coloured rags of clouds drifting across it; the moon peered out spasmodically, and there was a scattering of pale stars. The line of the distant hills showed black and sinister, and across the dark moor towards Cortinchy the white road gleamed like a thin pale-coloured ribbon. I struck out southwards towards the loch and walked mechanically for a long time, lost in my thoughts. The woman Ella dwelt constantly in my mind and I found myself thinking about her and her sorrow over the dog Phryxos, trying to remember the connection between the two names "Helle" and "Phryxos", trying to "place" my own flashes of vision, her sudden lapse into ancient Greek, and a dozen other aspects of the whole thing. You understand, it would have been easier for me to get the hang of the thing complete if she'd been a patient? For I could have questioned her, probed her, put her under control if necessary, and so got to the bottom of it—but I'd only seen her in snatches, as it were, and everything was still completely confused; still in threads, if you like, and I couldn't knit the threads up into anything resembling a real pattern.

I walked until I was thoroughly tired, and found myself at last on the brink of the loch, where I flung myself down on the heather, thanking my stars that the rain was at present merely a hint, not a reality, and the heather springy and scented and dry, a delightful bed on which to rest. I sprawled there, brooding and staring down into the water below.

It glimmered darkly in the moonlight, a giant mirror of silver and black—silver where the moon shone down on it, dead black where the cliff curled over and cast its shadow upon it. They said it had no bottom, here at the north end, and indeed it was a fact that it was one of the deepest lochs in the Highlands. A lovely place—but a strangely sinister one at eleven o'clock at night, with the moon riding high and me with God knows what strange things setting to partners in my mind. . . .

I propped my feet against a projecting stone, for in the last twenty yards or so before the drop the land took on a sharpish slope, and I had no desire to slide or roll over into the black-shining depths below, there to drown silently under the moon—for it was certain that no cry for help could reach the house, more than a mile away upland, and there was not even a crofter's cottage near! I dropped a stray pebble down to the water below, and the glassy surface broke as though splintered and sent out ring after ring, rippling away towards the distant shores until the last one faded out and the mirror was complete again. Then on a sudden impulse I raised my head and looked back towards the house, now a mere dark silhouette starred with a few occasional lights in the distance—and it was then that I saw her coming down the heather, with her dog at her heels!

I think that from that instant I knew the end—and knew it too, to be the only solution, the happiest, the most complete. In any case I could have done nothing to stop it—that I know! I was held silent—spellbound if you like—as I watched her come; I could no more have risen and tried to stop her than I could have flown then and there to the moon! When I first saw her she was merely a gaunt silhouette against the moon, but swiftly she neared me.

She had kilted her skirts high to the knee and was running, running easily with long strides over the heather, as her Scottish forebears must have run at Culloden, at Flodden Field, at Bannockburn and many score of other places. Her head was bare and her hair flying loose, and in the silver light of the moon it looked darkly red, almost blood colour, and the great dog

bounding at her heels, with its tongue hanging from its mouth, flung up its head from time to time to look at her triumphantly, adoringly, in this their last race together. Last—yes! I tell you I knew the end. The only possible end for those two in this life, poor distracted ones, Phryxos and Helle!

Onward she came towards me, but even had it been light I doubt if she would have noticed me. She was moving in a dream not of this earth. Her face shone white as bone in the moonlight, and it was lit with a strange unearthly gladness that caught at my heart as I looked—and as she came speeding onwards she cried aloud in a strange, high voice, shrill, triumphant. . . .

And even as I looked it came again—the Vision, sure and sharp this time, complete! As though a giant had come down and wiped away the dark moor, the cloud-streaked sky, the distant lights of the house, so the whole scene vanished clean away, and I saw again the sunbathed shore, the green forestland that sloped down to it, and beyond the breakers, at the edge of a blue, blue sea beneath a bluer sky, a group of laughing, naked girls played and shouted, and their great hounds with them, leaping and barking and shaking the spray from their shaggy hides. And from the forest *she* came running, with Phryxos at her heels! A girl tall, lithe and lean-flanked, with only a leopard-skin bound about her whiplike body, and her ruddy hair afloat in the wind of her running. She flung up her arm as she came speeding on, and a roar of welcome rose up to greet her from the shore. The great dog leapt up to her, barking, joyful—and clear and loud upon the sunny air I heard her answering cry as together she and her dog flung themselves forward into the waiting waves.

*" Afiknoumai! Afiknoumai! Oth' estin e Helle! "*¹

The room was very silent as he finished. The sun had sunk to rest and the gracious orchid-coloured twilight was flooding the room where we sat. Hans had entered silently and sat at Pennoyer's feet, his great nose laid along his master's knee, his eyes gazing into space as Pennoyer fondled his head. I cleared my throat awkwardly and Pennoyer nodded.

"I know," he said. "It's a story that gets one that way. And yet . . . I felt it was the only way out. Better that than for her to eat her heart out for her brother in a bleak London house and he for her in the Highlands—for without each other, found again so strangely, they would have surely died!"

¹ "I am coming! I am coming! Here is Helle!"

"Brother?" I asked.

Pennoyer nodded.

"Surely! Phryxos and Helle—don't you remember the story of the Hellespont and the origin of the Golden Fleece? Don't ask me for explanation, for I haven't one. Though I've learnt a little more than many men, yet the longer I live the more I find I know nothing! Nothing at all. . . ."

"What did Angus say?" I asked after a pause. "And that damned woman?"

Pennoyer shrugged.

"What *could* they say? I did my best to get down to the edge of the loch, but during the day it's a good half-hour's difficult scramble, and during the night . . . well, it was an hour before I stood at the far side of the loch and looked up at the beetling cliff-edge over which those two gallant souls had leapt singing to their death. There was no sign of them, of course. Two days afterwards the bodies were found much further down the loch, where the current had washed them ashore; she had her hand twisted fast into the shaggy hair of the collie's back—she must have grasped it as she fell. I didn't see them, though—I'd left for London. I'd had enough. I heard they buried them together, and I was glad. Angus was vaguely upset—I think he sensed something not quite—explicable, shall we say?—about the thing. But the Fiscal's verdict was 'accidental death', and as she was known to have been in the habit of going long walks with the collie, it was concluded that she went too near the cliff-edge on a dark night, lost her footing and fell. And the best verdict too, on the whole. I said nothing—of course. There was nothing I *could* say. But it is one of my most amazing memories, that, when I saw Ella McLeod, who was Helle of the Amazons, go glad and singing with her brother back to her own—and to death—in that lonely loch in the heart of Bonnie Scotland."

4

THE CASE OF THE WHITE SNAKE

I HAD BEEN OUT with Pennoyer in his car for a long run into the country, and on coming home we were held up at a crossing to allow a long file of little girls to go across the road.

They walked in pairs, in the old-fashioned "crocodile", neatly but rather drably dressed all alike, in plain brown dresses and coats and little round brown caps, and they were led by a pair of nuns in the black cloth habits and widespreading white coifs of a well-known Sisterhood. We waited until the last pair had crossed the road and vanished within a pair of wide wooden gates labelled "S. Andrew's Orphanage for Catholic Children", and as he let in the clutch and we started, with the rest of the traffic, to move on again, Pennoyer remarked:

"Orphanage children . . . that reminds me of a story concerning an Orphanage that you might like to hear, to add to that world-shaking record of my doings that you seem to be keeping!" He slanted a mischievous glance at me. "Care to come to dinner with me, Jerry? There isn't time for Friedl to get in any of that meat you're so fond of, but there's Bavarian chestnut soup, and you know her omelettes are not things to be despised—I've some delicious fresh sourmilk cheese and a salad, and I'll mix the salad-dressing myself. What about it?"

In point of fact I had a dinner-engagement already, but an evening with Pennoyer plus a new story was not a thing to be missed. I instantly made up my mind to telephone an excuse to my hostess while Pennoyer was putting the car away, and nodded at once.

"Of course—nothing I would like better! Let's get back as fast as we can."

It started (said Pennoyer) when I went down to spend a week-end with a distant cousin of mine who was matron of a large Orphanage situated on the outskirts of a sleepy little town called Abbots' Holme, somewhere in one of the Home Counties.

Jane Ormond was a splendid woman! Well-born, well-educated, married and widowed in the last war, and subsequently losing her only child by meningitis, she had dedicated herself to nursing as a profession—especially children's nursing. She soon

became well known, not only as a fine and capable nurse, but as a woman of outstanding ability all round, especially in the direction of organizing and handling staff as well as her little charges. So as time went on she was promoted to various positions of increasing importance in the nursing and medical world—no time to detail them here and they are not necessary anyway. I only quote them to give you a mental idea of her. And finally, when she was about fifty, she was appointed Matron of the Orphanage at Abbots' Holme. . . .

It was a job after her own heart, as it gave her a more or less free hand with something like two hundred children, boys and girls, all, poor little souls, without friends or relations in the world, and Jane's big heart rejoiced at the chance of mothering the lot of them. She had been settled at Abbots' Holme for some seven or eight years, I suppose, when I received a letter from her asking whether I could possibly make it convenient to come down for a short visit. She wanted, she said, a private talk to me about something that was causing her grave anxiety. It was a subject too long and difficult to write about, but would I come if I could, and soon?

On the face of it there seemed nothing odd about the letter. Jane had "mothered" me when I was a lonely boy in my teens, and although we were both too busy to correspond with any regularity, we had kept in touch with each other from time to time, and the "subject" to which she alluded might simply have been some business on which she wanted advice—but I knew it could not be that, as I'm hopeless as regards business, while she is eminently capable! Neither could it be to discuss some family affair, for as far as family ties go, outside our two selves and a few stray elderly relatives like Uncle Benbow, we were both more or less alone in the world. And I was sure that Jane would never have sent for me simply to talk over some private worry or tragedy—she was too proud and self-reliant a woman to want to sob out her grief on anybody's shoulder! Yet from the urgency of the letter's phrasing, it was plain that something was gravely wrong, so I got Jane on the telephone and told her I would be delighted to come as soon as I had finished with two or three cases I had on hand. I was dealing, at that time, with a curious case of atavism—City man throwing back to the primitive under certain stimuli—and I rather think that the Gleaming Dog case was at that time too. Anyway, I couldn't leave them unconcluded, and I told my cousin so.

She assented at once, but her final words, "That's all right, I'll wait . . . but I *hope* you won't be too long!" though they were uttered in her usual cheery, self-possessed tones, hinted again at urgency, and as soon as I could manage it I set out for Abbots' Holme. I had visited it only once before, very soon after my cousin's entering upon her duties there, and I looked about me with pleasure as the taxi drove me from the station out to the Home.

I had forgotten what a pretty place it was—a delightful little town set in beautiful rolling country, sufficiently far off the beaten track to have retained a good deal of its Elizabethan picturesqueness, the main beauty spot being a handsome old Butter Market with the original peaked and raftered roof and flagged flooring, with an ancient stone well-head just outside it against which every tourist insisted on posing for a snapshot. It further boasted a genuine old church of much the same period as the Butter Market, and a large proportion of the shops and houses along the High Street were built with the black-and-white cross-timbering over which every American goes crazy; and—as one might have guessed from the name—there was also, some two miles outside the town itself, a ruined Abbey surrounded with water-meadows, which was a favoured place for picnics and more snapshotting. Altogether, as regards setting, one could scarcely imagine a more pleasant background for the "Abbots' Holme Foundation", as the Orphanage was called—a name which Jane, with the quirk of humour I always liked about her, said reminded her of the all-in-one undergarment for ladies' wear that used to be known as a "corselette".

The Foundation was an austere Victorian but not unhandsome group of red-brick buildings about two miles outside the little town, set in large grounds that, as I remembered them, had been clipped and fenced, pruned and tidied until they were almost as severe-looking as the buildings themselves, upon which not a leaf of ivy or creeper of any kind was allowed to grow. But when I turned in at the great gates and drove up the gravelled drive to the side-entrance used for private visitors, I stared about me in pleased surprise. The rigid austerity of buildings and gardens that I remembered in the early days, had vanished like a dream!

The trees and shrubs now spread their branches unhindered; the beds and borders, where I dimly remembered prim rows of the eternal lobelia, geranium and calceolaria, were riotous with

night I have invited two neighbours to dinner—a Colonel Milward and his sister, Mrs. Drury, who live next door. It is a bore, but I had to invite them because she is giving a garden-party for the Orphanage and we have to talk over arrangements. So if you don't mind, I'll get Tatie to take these things away, and we can have a talk."

It brought back my boyhood, when Jane was a young woman, with an almost painful vividness to see her old cook, dear fat "Spud", stout and cheery as ever, though growing slow and stiff in her movements, come waddling into the room. I hugged her, to her delight, and it brought a queer feeling to my throat to hear her call me "Master Miles" and refuse with indignation to allow me to carry the tray out for her—and when the door closed behind her sturdy white-overalled figure, I settled back in my chair and smiled, albeit rather ruefully, at Jane.

"Seeing Spud has made me feel older than anything else for a long time!" I said. "Well, well! *Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe.*"

"All but love!" said Jane softly, and I saw her blue eyes turn towards the double frame that held the portraits of her young husband and her bonny little son, dead thirty years ago and more.

I was silent, remembering Douglas Ormond, six-foot-four of magnificent Scottish manhood, fit mate for the stately young woman he had married. Now she sat, a grey-haired matron who had renounced the world and dedicated herself, as a Nun to God, to the service of others—but in her eyes I saw the proof of her words. Truly all passes, but love remains. . . .

I cleared my throat, blinked eyes that were in danger of watering and pulled myself together. There was work to be tackled, and this was no time to allow myself to wallow in sentiment!

"Come on, Jane," I said. "Out with it! What's the trouble?"

"It started only about a couple of months ago," said Jane. One of the things I always liked about her was that she could come straight to the point like a man. "That is, I first began to hear about it then—but for all I know it *may* have started earlier. It started among the children—a rumour of a queer sort of nightmare about a *snake*!"

"Dream of one child, or several?" I queried.

"Several," said Jane. "I first got wind of it via one of my junior nurses, who came to me with an odd tale about finding the

children in one of the dormitories, one night when she went on her rounds, all crying and clutching each other, and calling out about a snake. When she tried to find out what was wrong she got a confused account of seeing a snake . . . a *white* snake, of all things . . . crawl in over the windowsill and come towards them! Of course I thought it was one child having a particularly vivid nightmare about a snake and waking shrieking about it, and so setting the others off . . . you know, the sort of infective semi-hysteria one gets so easily among children. . . ."

"Which it might easily have been!" I commented. "If it had only been this one isolated outburst. But I take it it wasn't."

"Indeed it wasn't!" said Jane. "Nurse Jenks soothed them down—told them they'd been dreaming, tucked them up with a drink of milk and stayed with them till they settled off, and for the rest of the night they were all right. But—it happened again! And again. . . ."

"Anything to do with the dormitory, d'you think?" I said.

"I thought of that," said Jane. "But that dormitory's been in regular use ever since I came, and there had never been any sort of trouble before. However, after the second visitation I moved them into another dormitory—and it came *there*! I began to think the mass-hysteria idea was right after all, and decided to split up that particular group of children. I thought that possibly they had been together too long and were reacting on each other or taking their tune subconsciously from one among them who was subject to these dreams and, without realizing it, impressing them on the others. . . ."

"That was wise of you, Jane," I said. "What happened?"

"It didn't work," she said. "It came a third time—a week or so after the separating of the children—and a fourth. And *that* time, damn it, one of my staff saw it! Nurse Jenks—the nurse I told you of before. This time the children didn't awaken. Her movement startled it, and it vanished before it was really inside the dormitory—it was coming in over the sill, she said—and nothing more happened that night. But she came to me in the morning and told me, and then I thought it was about time I got you down to look into things and see whether there *is* anything uncanny about, or whether we are all getting infected with some absurd sort of hallucination!" She laughed, but her eyes were anxious. "I would be heart-broken if rumours or stories got about that might spoil the work I've set going here. I do feel

that I *am* doing a worthwhile job—the place is gay and bright and cheerful now, and the children's health and spirits twice as good as when I first came, though I had a running fight with the Guardians of the Foundation for two whole years at the beginning, over the changes I insisted on making."

"I'll bet you had," I said sincerely, and she nodded.

"Oh yes! They were horrified at first, though they are mostly dears—but they're the old-fashioned sort of dears who, having seen little orphans in their dim youth wearing black frocks and mob-caps and aprons and living in grim grey stone buildings like tenement-houses, somehow feel they always ought to do so. They've got used to my revolutionary changes now—and they're even rather sneakingly proud of them! When one of the leading illustrated papers published a group of photographs of the Orphanage last year, and spoke of it as 'one of the most modern and progressive places of its kind in England', I could almost hear them purr."

She laughed.

"I insisted on letting the children run loose in the grounds—in the old days they were herded into a dismal asphalted playground at the back of the house, and I made that playground into an outdoor schoolroom for warm weather instead! I rushed the children and my staff into bright-coloured clothes, and spouted yards of colour-psychology to my bewildered Guardians when they protested, and I painted Disney pictures all over the dormitories, which were about as cheerful as a workhouse ward—each is named after a different Disney film now. I banished holland curtains and grey blankets and ugly thick white crockery and God knows how many other horrors—oh, I can't even begin to list up the changes I made, but by the time I was through, my old dears were so thoroughly bewildered that they swallowed even my red dress without a blink! I've got them so that they—most of them, anyway—let me have my way, and I was so happy everything was working so well, and now this has to happen!"

"Does anybody outside know about it yet?" I asked.

Jane shook her head.

"No, I'm pretty sure it hasn't got out . . . yet. But if I can't stop it, sooner or later it must, and when it does, my opponents—and of course there *are* some, both on the Board and in Abbots' Holme itself—who never approved my drastic changes here, will, of course, say that it's due to *them*, and that nothing like this ever

happened when the place was run in the old Victorian way—which is, unluckily, true! And I would not only stand a strong chance of getting the sack—which I should mind, of course—but all the modernization I've introduced might well be swept away by my successor and the rigid, narrow old system reimposed . . . which I should mind a great deal more!"

I nodded. I understood.

"Know anything about the history of the house?" I asked.

Jane shook her head.

"I don't think there's anything there," she said. "I thought of that, and went as closely into the history of the place as I could, but there doesn't seem to be a thing one can catch hold of. If it had been built on Church lands, or if it had been an old converted manor-house whose ghost we might have inherited . . . but the buildings are comparatively modern, built about 1870, as you can tell from their style, and they were built on land given for the purpose by somebody, land that never had anything to do with the Abbey, which is right on the other side of the town. No, everything's straight and above-board there as far as I can see. Then I went into the records of my predecessors here—there haven't been many, they seem to have lived to a ripe old age in the place, as I'd hoped to do." Her eyes were momentarily sad as they wandered over the green lawns and the playing children. "But never a hint of anything either criminal, or even doubtful, that might serve as a breeding-ground for a spook! Nor a hint of anything queer being seen at any time. It appears my snake's a new fashion—and I don't like it."

I rose from my chair and tucked my arm through hers.

"Don't worry," I said. "We'll solve the problem all right, given half a chance. And now you've given me the gen, as the R.A.F. boys have it, suppose you take me out and about and let me have a look at your reconstituted domain before we have to get ready for dinner?"

I spent a very pleasant and interesting half-hour with my cousin. It was touching to see how beloved she was by the children, who, oblivious of the starched apron and wide coif that marked "Matron" as being apart from and superior to the merry-faced young women who were their regular attendants, came running to greet her with shouts of joy, those that reached her first leaping to hug her, flinging their arms round her waist, fighting to clutch her hand or, failing that, a bit of her dress, and all clamouring like a brood of young chicks about their mother hen.

It was good to see Jane with a toddler sitting on one shoulder, half a dozen clinging to her gay red skirts and goodness knows how many following her, moving across the smooth lawns like a tall comet with a long tail, and as I watched her I registered a vow that I would not fail to lift the shadow that seemed to be determined to darken the latter years of her life as the shadow of war and death had darkened her young womanhood.

"She's wonderful, isn't she?" said a brisk voice at my side, and I turned to see a slim young woman of roughly twenty-seven or eight wearing the clear yellow linen overall and cap to match that was the uniform of the Orphanage staff.

I smiled. Evidently the babies were not the only adorers that my cousin had in her little kingdom!

"Why yes, I think she is," I said. "She is my cousin, as you probably know. My people both died young and she mothered me for years . . . she started on orphans early, you see!"

"She's wonderful," repeated the girl. "It's just too bad that she should be worried over things that aren't anything to do with her. . . ."

She stopped suddenly, looking rather guilty. I looked at her attentively. "Such as . . . ?" I suggested, but she flushed and shook her head.

"I shouldn't have said that," she said ruefully. "My tongue's always running away with me! Matron often has to tick me off about chattering."

She laughed and tucked back a stray curl that had escaped from the close folds of her cap. "I must fly—there's that Battersby child fallen over, and she always raises a bawl if she gets hurt."

She took to her heels and ran after my cousin and her flock of small followers, looking little more than a tall child herself with her short yellow skirt and long slim legs, in becoming "sunburn" coloured stockings, flashing in the sun. Remembering a description Jane had once given me of the staff dresses approved by her predecessor: "Dark blue alpaca, with stiff collars and ankle-length skirts and black stockings . . ." I smiled, visualizing the fight that Jane must have put up to allow her galaxy of girl helpers to wear clothes so drastically different. But already, before I had been half an hour in the place, I could see that her fight had been more than justified. The whole atmosphere of Abbots' Holme Orphanage was changed from my memory of it. It was now a bright and happy home, not a mere charitable institution—and

I went in to change with my resolve to keep Jane in her place and in her position more intensified than ever.

Jane's friends, Mrs. Drury and her brother Colonel Milward, had already arrived when I got down to Jane's little sitting-room and she was pouring sherry and talking with her usually gracious poise.

She introduced me as her cousin who had come down for the week-end, and I joined in the talk, while studying the new arrivals.

Mrs. Drury was a plump, pleasant-faced widow of roughly sixty or perhaps a little less, dressed in black satin with one of those vague, rather bitty garments that used to be known as "bridge-coats"—made, as far as I could see, of a sort of flowered brocade trimmed with a bordering of black fur. Jane later informed me that the lady had probably paid a great deal of money for the said garment, as it was shot with gold thread and the fur was black fox—but I am bound to say it still looked to me like a rather ornate sort of dressing-jacket. Still, I could see that the diamonds she wore were obviously fine—two or three rings, an old-fashioned but handsome butterfly brooch, and ear-rings to match—and she carried a bag made of beautiful French petit-point work with a jewelled fastening. It was evident that she was a woman well-placed in the world and seemed well-meaning and agreeable enough, though inclined to assume direction of any and everybody, and especially of her brother, who, I understood, lived with her in a large house, Drury Place, situated just beyond the grounds of the Orphanage.

We went in to dinner in the pretty little "alcove" dining-room that opened off the sitting-room, and as we drank our soup I turned to study the second visitor.

Colonel Milward looked a few years younger than his sister, and I took an instant liking to him. Tall, with grey hair and tired blue eyes, he reminded me vaguely of the White Knight in *Alice in Wonderland*. Jane had told me he possessed a distinguished record as a soldier, winning a D.S.O. and bar in the war of 1914, and later soldiering for years in India, until severe wounds received in a punitive campaign against some hill-tribes somewhere in Assam forced him into retirement at fifty, when he had come home to live with his sister. On the outbreak of war of 1939, he had tried to rejoin his regiment, but, pronounced unfit for active service, had been taken on at the War Office and worked there until a further collapse in health had forced him into retiring once

more to his sister's care.

He was a quiet man and said little, but had a singularly charming voice when he did speak—and from the first I was struck with the look of suffering in his eyes. They held the look of a man who endures, patiently and gallantly, a secret pain that nothing can assuage . . . a pain that has nothing physical about it. A pain that sprang from some deep-seated wound of the heart, and I told myself that here was a man with a tragedy hidden somewhere in his life, as we exchanged the usual polite inanities while we sipped our soup and waited for the fish. Mrs. Drury more than made up for her brother's silence by her talkativeness, and she was full of the party that she proposed to give in the large garden of her house, in aid of the Orphanage funds . . . although, she added, with a roguish glance at my cousin, she rather doubted whether the Orphanage really needed funds, it was doing so well!

"We always need funds!" said Jane tranquilly as she helped the fried sole. "Oh yes, I know I've got far more money out of the Powers That Be for my children than anybody would have dreamed possible. But there are lots of other things I've got in my head for them. I want a swimming-pool made in the grounds, for instance . . ."

"Swimming-pool—for ch . . . for this class of child?" queried Mrs. Drury, round-eyed.

I guessed that she had all but said "charity children", but faced with a warlike gleam in her hostess's eye, had substituted a milder term.

"Swimming-pool—capital idea, capital!" said the Colonel in the same breath, and Mrs. Drury favoured her brother with a glance in which astonishment was not unmingled with disapproval. She was evidently unused to his taking a line of his own.

"But for *this* class of child?" she repeated. "My dear Matron . . ."

"Every child, no matter what class it is born into," said Jane firmly, "should know how to swim! It should also know how to defend itself—so later on I'd like to engage an expert and organize ju-jitsu classes for the older boys and girls. The gymnasium we started two years ago is a huge success, and the drill and physical jerks—the children are showing great improvement in health and poise all round."

Mrs. Drury frowned faintly as she spooned parsley sauce over her fish.

"But do you think," she said tentatively, and I noted the phrasing, feeling sardonically sure that with no other woman would the lady have used such a mild opening—"do you *really* think, dear Matron, that for children of that class . . ."

"I don't think about class—ever!" said Jane tersely. "As far as that goes, God knows what class half these poor little things belong to, as we don't know their parentage or anything about them. Anyway, does 'class' matter? These children will have to make their own way in life, and I consider that in teaching them everything we possibly can, equipping them to meet as many possibilities as we can think of, we are merely doing our duty towards the future citizens of our country."

I saw the Colonel look admiringly at my cousin across the table, and certainly, in the severe black lace gown that had replaced her uniform for her "off-time" evening, with that faint flare of indignant colour on her cheeks, she looked singularly handsome. But Mrs. Drury was by no means satisfied.

"But," she persisted, "most of the girls, surely, will go out to service? What sort of use will swimming be to them, or ju-jitsu, or physical 'jerks'?" She pronounced the last word with a faint *moue* of distaste.

"Almost fifty per cent of the children here are boys," said Jane, "and a certain percentage of these become sailors or cross the sea to find jobs—but even if they don't, I still consider swimming a thing every boy and girl should learn. It may not only save one's own life, but the lives of others. And as regards physical training for girls—well, apart from improved general health, most of them will marry, and a fit, well-trained body means strong children and a healthy delivery. And as for ju-jitsu not being necessary to women, my dear Mrs. Drury, if poor Lily Applegate had known how to defend herself by ju-jitsu she would be living now, and that drunken young fool who killed her wouldn't be awaiting his death on the twenty-sixth of this month!"

There was an uncomfortable silence, since the tragic murder of the young woman in question, after a village dance, was a recent headline in the papers. It was perhaps a good thing that the arrival of the next course furnished a chance for a change of conversation, and by the time we had reached the sweet Mrs. Drury was again upon her pet subject, the forthcoming party.

Could Matron suggest something new for the children to do? Musical games—dancing—or perhaps a little play? Last year

they had had tableaux, which had been very pretty, though scarcely an unadulterated success, as two or three of the younger children had not been able to keep still. Did Matron remember how one or two had got bored towards the end and actually yawned, begun fidgeting, or tried to walk off the stage instead of standing still? Now of course she might be old-fashioned, but she could not help feeling that this modern tendency to allow the growing generation so much liberty of action *did* lead to a tendency to disregard instructions from their elders and betters . . . "orders" they were, actually, of course, though again, that phrase was not popular in these Socialistic days. Now in the days of dear old Matron Corcoran, who was a martinet of the stern traditional school, not a child would have dared to move when it had once been placed in a tableau by its teacher—it would have barely dared to breathe!

Jane laughed her frank spontaneous laugh as she rose from the table and led the way back into the sitting-room, now warmly bright with the rays of the setting sun shining across the lawn outside.

"I know my predecessor was a splendid woman," she said sincerely, "but honestly, I prefer a child with sufficient character and independence to show it's bored, even to spoiling a tableau, to one so cowed that it daren't move even if it wants to!"

Her back was towards the door and she was pouring out the coffee as she was speaking. Mrs. Drury was eyeing her with a faintly acid expression that amused me—it was plain that, unused to any contradiction in her well-ruled little world, the lady in question, despite her soft pussy-cat exterior, possessed claws that she would have liked to use had not Jane's serene imperturbability rendered her immune from any scratchings! The Colonel was stretching out his hand for his sister's cup when there came a faint rattle at the door handle and Jane called out, "Come in!" Her head was still turned when, with apparent difficulty, the handle was turned and the head of a small child peeped diffidently into the room.

The visitor was a chubby, dark-eyed little girl of roughly about four years old, wearing a pink cotton night-dress, with her dark hair screwed into two tight little plaits each side of her face, one tied with a bit of pink ribbon . . . she was barefoot, and held the skirt of her night-dress up with one small fist while she peered bashfully, yet with a certain mischievous assurance, round the door.

Mrs. Drury gave a sudden exclamation that was echoed by the Colonel's amused "Hullo, what have we got here?" and Jane turned round.

Her eyes widened and she began to laugh, put the coffee-pot down and with two strides came over to the small intruder and picked her up.

"Upon my word, this is a piece of cheek! What do you mean by it?"

The words were severe, but the way in which my cousin cuddled the culprit and rubbed her cheek against the round little dark head removed from them any flavour of real reproof, and the freedom with which the baby put her arms round Jane's neck and hugged her brought a warm feeling to my heart. It spoke well for the place the Matron of Abbots' Holme Orphanage occupied in the hearts of her charges when one of them could penetrate the sanctity of her private apartments, sure not only of escaping reproof but of receiving a warm welcome!

Mrs. Drury's face was a study as, nodding casually to me to finish pouring out the coffee, Jane sat down with the child upon her knee, and answered the Colonel's interested query.

"This is one of our youngest babies—she's only been here about a year. Her name is—what do we call you, Baby?"

"Mat'on call me 'Colette'," lisped the scrap, her dark eyes fixed curiously on the tall, brown-faced man who sat regarding her, leaning forward in his chair, his crossed arms resting on his knees. "But Nursie call me Pittles!"

"Pickles, she means," laughed Jane. "She's always in mischief, this baby—it takes the nurses all their time to keep an eye on her. She wriggles out of control like a little eel—she must have given Nurse the slip this evening. Though I can't imagine how she found her way here. These rooms are quite shut off from the main part of the building, and she's never been here before."

"Colette no eel—'ittle dirl!" insisted the small creature, butting her head, with its two comic upstanding tails of hair, against my cousin's shoulder.

The Colonel laughed loudly, and the child turned and looked at him again—then suddenly slipped from Jane's lap down to the floor and toddled towards him. Mrs. Drury's mouth opened as her brother, flushing faintly, held out his hand to the little stumbler, and as she held out both arms to him he bent down and, gathering her into his arms, set her awkwardly on his lap.

The baby settled down happily and began playing with the buttons on his dress shirt, and the good lady's expression was so confounded that it was all I could do not to laugh!

It was plain that she most heartily disapproved of this forwardness on the part of a "charity child"—and even plainer that she did not dare to express it, nor to suggest that the child be spanked severely and packed off to join its own kind. But before she could make up her mind what to do, if anything, there came another tap at the door and the flushed face of a young nurse peeped in. The pretty young nurse with whom I had held a brief conversation on the lawn only a short time ago. . . .

She came tentatively into the room as my cousin nodded—she was carrying a scrap of pink ribbon in one hand, and Jane looked at it understandingly.

"I suppose you tracked the truant by finding that ribbon in the passage outside," she remarked. "She is all right, fortunately . . . but you know, nurse, you *should* keep a closer eye on your charges. How on earth . . ."

"Oh, Matron!" The girl's eyes filled with tears. "I *am* so dreadfully sorry, I can't tell you! But you know Nurse Arnott's off with a temperature and Nurse Elson's away on holiday, and we're rather short . . . and the Green twins made themselves sick eating elderberries when they were out in the garden, and I suppose I was so busy looking after them that I took my eye off Little Pickles' bed for a few minutes." She eyed the child, cuddled comfortably in her large protector's arms, with reproachful eyes. "And it *was* only a few minutes! I'd tucked her in myself and told her to go to sleep, and when I looked again she'd gone!"

The culprit shook her head cheerfully and the absurd pigtails bobbed like mad.

"'Tittle Pittle!" she remarked brightly, and the Colonel chuckled as Jane laughed.

"I know what a handful she is only too well," she assented. "Well, I'll overlook it this once, as I know you were rushed and she has come to no harm, but seriously, Nurse Jenks, you must not let it happen again. Now take her to bed—and see that she stays there."

I glanced with interest at the girl. "Nurse Jenks?"—this was the nurse that had seen the mysterious snake! I must have a word with her on the morrow.

I watched her as she stooped to pick up the baby from the

Colonel's knee, but Little Pickles was in no mood to leave her conquest so quickly.

"No, no!" she cried mutinously, and catching the lapels of the Colonel's coat, held on grimly while she squirmed and kicked furiously at her would-be captor. "No, *no*—ont to stay wit' big man! Ont to stay wit' man!"

Tiny as she was, she fought so determinedly to stay with her new friend that it took a perceptible number of minutes before the shy and breathless Nurse Jenks could prise her apart from him and carry her, still struggling and howling, to the door. The Colonel, quite agitated, had risen to his feet and looked anxiously after the small termagant.

"Er—isn't it bad to let a child yell like that? Mightn't it burst something or other?" he asked diffidently. "I don't like . . . er . . . would it be quiet if I went along with it, ah . . . a little of the way, eh?"

I simply did not dare to look at Mrs. Drury's face again—I knew I would laugh if I did! But I knew by instinct that her mouth was open as she stared at her brother, and even Jane paused a moment, surprised and faintly amused, before she replied.

"Well, Colonel, I don't think you need worry! If turbulent babies were apt to break anything inside themselves every time they got into a tantrum we'd have a string of hospital cases a day, wouldn't we, nurse? But if you like, by all means go along with the child as far as the big green-baize door at the head of the stairs that leads into the House—the official part of it, I mean, as apart from this little private corner of it. I'm afraid I can't let you go further, as it's long after visiting hours! And what on earth would my Governors say if they knew I was breaking rules and letting a visitor in after hours?"

She rose and went over to the child, momentarily quiet in Nurse Jenks' arms as she listened—or seemed to—to the conversation, her great dark eyes moving from one face to another.

"Now listen, Baby! The big man will walk with you as far as the green door and kiss you good night there, but if you cry or scream then, and don't go to bed quietly, I won't let you see him again at all. So you must be a good girl now—d'you understand?"

The little thing nodded at once, held out a minute fist to the Colonel, who took it with a rich blush, and the oddly assorted trio left the room. There was a pause and Mrs. Drury spoke.

There was a faint tang of acidity in her tone.

"Well, Matron, you must forgive me—but I do *really* think you are too lenient!"

Jane smiled.

"Towards whom?" she said. "Towards Nurse Jenks or the child?"

"Towards both, I should have said," said Mrs. Drury sourly. "After all, the girl must have been very slack to have let that child slip out of the dormitory without seeing her. And you didn't show the smallest sign of disapproval towards the child herself, though she *must* have known she was being disobedient in pushing her way into your private rooms as though she had a right there. How on earth are these children to be properly trained for a working life unless one is really strict with them from a very early age?"

"I like to feel that all my children have a right here," said Jane gently, "and frankly, I don't believe in punishing a baby for a mere piece of mischief. Regarding Nurse Jenks, I admit she is faulty in many ways—slapdash, forgetful, many other things—but she has a supreme love for children and a genuine eagerness to learn how to care for them; and those qualities, to me, compensate for many faults."

There was dissent in every line of Mrs. Drury's face as she listened, but she was silent as Jane went on.

"I hope I am seeing to it that these children are, as you put it, 'trained for life' as far as teaching them various trades and crafts is concerned, so that they will be able to earn their livings when they go out into the world. As you know, the Orphanage's system of training is very thorough—I have no fear for their fitness as independent citizens. But I *do* feel that the best start I personally can give them—the best start for *all* children—is to feel they are *loved*. And these children need rather more love than most, since they have no parents to love them. Colette, poor baby—why, we don't even know her surname, since her mother was killed in an air-raid with a lot of other people in a shelter in London, and the child was dragged out, just alive, from under the débris. All we know about her is that she is foreign—probably French, as the child could speak a sort of baby French, though of course she is losing it now, and she said her name was 'Colette', though she didn't seem to know a surname—she came here with some other children who were orphaned in the same raid a year ago. Four years old now—only three when she was

left alone in the world! So . . .” Her eyes rested on Mrs. Drury with an expression of mingled amusement and compassion in their blue depths. “You see, I’m afraid I’m inclined to feel it a compliment when one of my children plays truant, not to run away from the Home, but to run away to me!”

My talk on the following day with Nurse Jenks was interesting. She had been told why I had come down, also the nature of my profession—with a warning as to secrecy, needless to say, as if the true facts got out amongst my cousin’s staff, the excitement, the gossip, the staring and discussing would have made any quiet investigation quite impossible. Nurse Jenks was greatly impressed and honoured by her beloved Matron’s confidence, and came down to the little sitting-room primed with importance and anxiety to tell all she knew. This was not much—but “what was there” (as George Robey used to sing in a forgotten comic song) “was good!”

She told me that in the Orphanage, as in all similar places, there was a regular system of “night-watching” over the sleeping children, and the nurse whose turn it was on duty made her headquarters, so to speak, in the dormitory where the smallest children slept—which, in the case of the first two visits of the Snake, was the dormitory named “Dumbo” after the delicious Disney elephant.

As my cousin had told me, after the Appearance had come for the second time, puzzled, but wondering whether possibly there was a “haunt” attached to the room called “Dumbo” (a true Scot, Jane was too “fey” entirely to dismiss the psychic possibilities even in the beginning), Jane gave orders to move the children to another dormitory . . . to the one called “Bambi”. The Snake then put in an appearance in “Bambi”, not in “Dumbo”, having followed the first group of children, it seemed—so by this time, thoroughly disturbed, Jane broke up the group and distributed it amongst the other dormitories, the baby Colette entering the one called “Snow-White”. And it was in that dormitory, on her first turn as night-nurse after the breaking-up of the original group of children, that Nurse Jenks, sitting at her post by the fire, first saw the Snake herself, and knew it was no figment of an excited child’s imagination. . . .

The “Snow-White” dormitory now contained eighteen youngsters of ages ranging from four to seven or eight years old. I asked about the planning of the dormitory, and Nurse

Jenks gave me a prompt and graphic picture in words.

The room was arranged much like a hospital ward, with a row of beds down each side, leaving a "corridor" of space down the middle. There was a window overlooking the grounds at the far end of the room, and a fire at the other end, with a screen beside it that at once hid the flicker of the fire from the children and gave the nurse on night-duty the chance of reading or working, to pass the long hours, by the light of a shaded lamp on a small table beside the fire. The children were all given a drink of milk to settle them off and were supposed to be tucked up and sound asleep by seven-thirty at latest, and on this particular night, though one or two turbulent infants had persisted in trying to romp or squeak or "play sick" in order to attract attention and delay the process of "going sleepies" for a quarter of an hour or so, by seven-thirty all was quiet, and Nurse Jenks settled into her comfortable chair by the fire.

The nurse on night duty was supposed, at intervals during the night, to visit the other dormitories to see that all was well, and she had made two of these periodic visits when, on returning to "Snow White", she sensed, as she put it, "something odd" in the atmosphere of the room. A feeling difficult to explain, she declared—especially as there was absolutely nothing in the room to account for it! The children all slept peacefully, the moonlight streamed in through the wide chink between the curtains—on Jane's orders the curtains were never close-drawn, as she was fanatically insistent upon fresh air for her charges—there was not a thing out of place in the long dormitory, and yet the girl felt, as she described it, "as though something, hearing me coming, had drawn back quickly so that I shouldn't see it!" I looked at her with interest. A "sensitive", there was no doubt about that, and this faculty might be a great help in handling the case . . . but I said nothing, only nodded to her to go on.

"I went and sat down in my usual place after staring round the room for a minute," she said, "and I tried to read, but I couldn't. I felt puzzled—and somehow a little scared! I told myself I was simply a fool, that that feeling couldn't possibly have meant anything . . . and yet, underneath all that, something else kept telling me that I *wasn't* a fool, and that it *did* mean something, only I couldn't place it! Anyway, after a while I settled down to read, and everything was quiet for a while, only I kept listening and waiting—sort of keyed-up as though I were expecting something

—and though I tried to lose myself in my book as I can usually do, I couldn't. And then I heard a sort of little whimper or half-cry, and I leant forward and peered round the edge of the screen. I don't know why I did it, as in a room where a lot of babies are sleeping those funny little noises aren't unusual, they gurgle or snort or whimper like puppies do in their dreams. But all the same, I leant forward . . . and I saw, slithering in over the windowsill as though it had climbed up from the garden below, a long white or greyish shape like a snake! "

Her eyes dilated at the memory—and indeed it sounded a gruesome sight enough, a gigantic snake climbing into a nursery full of sleeping children!

"Go on," I said, "what happened next? "

"I was so *petrified* with fright," she said, "that I sat stock still and stared for quite a minute. And I saw that horrible-looking Thing ooze its way—it's the only word I can think of that describes its movements—over the sill and down into the room, lengthening and lengthening as if It were *endless*, and begin to glide down the open space between the rows of beds, and then I woke from the dream of fascinated horror that was holding me and sprang up with a sort of half-yell of fright . . . and do you know, in a flash the thing was gone? Vanished! It didn't withdraw quickly and slither out of the window—it just blinked out, like a snapped-out electric light. Now what do you make of that? "

I got up.

"Most interesting, Nurse Jenks," I said briskly. "And now, could you take me up to the dormitory where you saw all this? "

We mounted endless stairs (for the Home had been built long before the era of lifts) and went down endless stone corridors, all clean and bright with shining paint and striped or flowered curtains, with strips of coloured felt to tread on that lightened the chilly effect of the stone floors, and at last I was ushered into a long room with a row of small beds each side, and a large window overlooking the garden at the far end—the window through which the Snake had entered.

It was a delightfully cheerful room. Each little bed had a toy of some sort tucked into its neatly folded blue eiderdown, the windows were blue-curtained, and the walls were painted with a meandering decorative frieze of Disney figures, the leading characters from "Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs", painted on a gay yellow ground, and beside each bed stood a miniature

chair painted bright blue, where each baby was taught to deposit its clothes each night. I noted with amusement as I walked down the room to the window that the figure of Dopey the dwarf, which was painted just low enough for a child to reach, had a badly smudged face, and Nurse Jenks informed me, laughing, that the reason was that the children were so sorry for him that they could not resist an occasional pat or even a kiss from a wet or sticky little mouth, out of pity for poor Dopey.

I was smiling still at the thought as I thrust my head out of the window and surveyed the scene outside. A clean drop to the green lawns below—sixty feet at least, and the walls of the house, but for a masking of creeper whose branches and stems were far too slender to support anything heavier than their weight of rustling leaves, as smooth as the back of a woman's hand! No earthly chance of anybody shinning up to the window—if there existed anyone with so perverted a sense of humour as to find it funny to thrust a "property" snake into a dormitory full of sleeping children! I drew in my head again and stood surveying the general scene outside. I could not, from where I stood, see where the garden of the Home ended and that of the next-door house began, as the dividing fence or wall was hidden in a mass of green leafage; but the red roof of the next-door house was visible above the trees some distance away, and I nodded towards it.

"What's that place?" I asked. "And who lives there?"

"Oh," said Nurse Jenks, "that's Drury Place, Mrs. Drury's house." She laughed. "She's really a very kind soul, but she's a trial to Matron and all of us, because though she gives a wonderful party every year, she expects the children to do a sort of amateur show—tableaux or dancing, or a little play of some sort—in return for it, and she asks all her friends and preens herself as though she had got it all up for them! Whereas *we've* had all the rehearsing and the training and the dressing of the children to do here, and naturally it makes us all rather wild!" She pointed to the mass of trees below. "There used to be a door in the garden-wall—down there—between the two houses, and in old Matron's day I believe Mrs. Drury used to come in and out as she chose, and rove about and keep an eye on things, and generally boss the show. But since Mrs. Ormond—*our* Matron—took things over, the door has been locked except for the yearly party. Matron said she was not going to allow anybody the right to come and poke about as they chose—and it took Mrs. Drury

a long time to recover from that! ”

“ A good-hearted soul cursed with a passion for interfering,” I commented, my eyes still fixed reflectively—why, I did not know—on the distant gables of Drury Place.

I could not imagine why, for some reason, I felt interested in Drury Place—what on earth had that to do with the quest I was on at the moment, the running to earth of the White Snake? I could not guess—and yet for some reason my mind went circling and poking, curious, reflective, about those red pointed gables that showed above the clustered trees. . . .

“ I suppose,” I said, “ this may not all have arisen from some child with a *penchant* for story-telling ‘ hazing ’ her play-fellows with some horrifying tale . . . pretending she sees something, for instance, and acting so well that she persuades the others they see it too? Some children adore to shock or frighten others—gives them a sense of power.”

Nurse Jenks shook her head.

“ Matron thought of that,” she said, “ but if there were a child like that we’d certainly have spotted her! It would surely be a child with a vivid imagination and some sort of gift for acting—and most of the children here are just jolly, ordinary little kids.”

I meditated.

“ Any sign of fear on going to bed? Do you think they talk about this Snake business among themselves, work up a sort of collective scare that might result in persuading themselves—and each other—that they thought they saw the thing, or else even produce a real thought-form by the sheer strength of their combined fear? ”

“ I don’t think so,” said the girl. “ It hasn’t had time—thank goodness!—to really dig itself in. The first time it happened, when I came in and found them in a huddle dithering about a Snake, I thought it was just nightmare and treated it as anybody would—I laughed and jollied them and told them they’d been dreaming, and after a while they began to think they really *had* been dreaming and went off to sleep again all right. Even when it happened the second and third time, and we began to get puzzled, I kept up the nightmare story, and they still think it some sort of a nasty dream, though they don’t like it—now and then one of them clings to me when I’m putting her to bed and says she hopes she won’t dream about *It* again.” Her voice shook with indignation. “ These babies—it’s just too bad! No, they still think it’s a dream—but *I* know it isn’t.”

"Have you seen it only that once?" I asked.

She shivered and her eyes dilated.

"I've seen it three times," she whispered. "That first time, and twice again since, only I didn't tell Matron—she's worried enough as it is. But I've seen it three times, and for all I know it may come every night, and not be noticed by the other nurses. I only saw it because I happened to peer round the screen."

"I don't know about that," I said. "It may only come when you're there—you may be necessary as a sort of focus, as an adolescent boy or girl is to a poltergeist. Tell me, what precisely is it *like*? Oh, I know it's a long snaky shape, and you say it's whitish or greyish—authentic ghost colour!" I laughed softly—there was no sense in losing one's sense of humour. "But how long is it, how thick—has it got a head and a tail, eyes, mouth, all the rest?"

"It—well, it's just like I told you, like a snake or a worm—or perhaps even more like the arm of an octopus. I saw an octopus once when I was on a cruise with some friends, so I know what they look like," the girl said with a shudder. "Either its head is very small or it hasn't *got* a head—there's no sort of neck or eyes that I can see—really it *is* more like a long tentacle than anything else. But as to how long it is, or whether it's got a tail, I couldn't tell you, because it never comes right into the room. It seems to elongate itself as it slithers in, so that some of it always remains outside the window. Last time it came half-way down the room before I saw it and yelled!"

"Outside the window?"

I stared down the long room. Half-way down that long dormitory, and still some of it left outside the window . . . the creature must be of a length altogether impossible for any earthly snake to attain! Though already by the "pricking of my psychic thumbs" I knew the Appearance, whatever it was, was no earthly snake, but *something* projected from the Beyond. . . .

"Has any other nurse seen it?" I asked.

"I think not," said the girl. "No, I'm sure not, as if they had I'd have been certain to have heard about it in the nurses' common room. They heard about the rumpus in 'Dumbo' dormitory, of course, but they put it down, as we all did, to the kids having nightmares and didn't think anything in particular about it. And, of course, I haven't breathed a word of what I've seen. But you see, as I said, it might easily come and not be noticed. It makes no noise, and if it hadn't been that first time

that I heard that baby whimpering and looked round the screen to see if everything was all right, I probably wouldn't have seen it! All nurses on night-duty use a screen to prevent the light on their tables from keeping the children awake. And then often, if the dormitories are quiet, the nurse on duty snoozes a bit off and on." She looked at me a little guiltily. "Please don't think I'm suggesting that we hog it all night and don't keep an eye on the children! In hospital one gets so that one can sort of catnap with one eye half open and wake the instant anything's wrong."

I laughed. I liked the impulsive, slangy little nurse.

"I understand," I said. "Well then, this appearance, whatever it is, may, you think, have paid several mysterious calls upon the children without being seen by the nurse on night-duty at the moment. But if that's so, it doesn't seem to have harmed them, does it?"

"N-no," she said doubtfully. "I can't say I've noticed any change in Little Pickles."

"Little Pickles?" I said, suddenly alert. "Why pick her out? Does this Thing, whatever it is, seem to come after *her*?"

Nurse Jenks nodded her head.

"That's what puzzles me!" she said. "It's come each time to the group of children where she is, and the three times I've watched it, it has always come slithering along towards *her* bed, out of the lot. I've changed her place in the room twice and it finds her each time—and always the same thing happens. It noses in over the windowsill and glides along to the foot of her bed, and last time it began to glide up over the foot on to the eiderdown . . . and then I jumped up, and it vanished like a flash!"

"I wonder," I said, "what it does when it gets *on* the bed? I wonder what it wants to do? I can scarcely believe it's a psychic vampire of any kind, as the child is plainly in bouncing health—and if a vampire were at work you'd soon see the effect. Lassitude, pallor, lack of spirits . . . no, whatever it's coming for it is plainly not to harm the child. Then what attracts it? It is not a poltergeist haunting of a new type, or we should have some sort of physical disturbance in the school . . . yet if what you say is so, that baby is the focus of the whole thing. . . . I shall have to arrange to sit up with you one night and see the Snake myself. Do you think that could be arranged?"

Nurse Jenks was sure that anything could be arranged that

might help towards solving the problem that threatened the peace of the Abbots' Holme Foundation—and I went thoughtfully downstairs again to my cousin's quarters. As I went I told myself that Jane's "case" certainly looked like being an interesting one. I had not wasted my time coming down. . . .

The next step might have entailed waiting, as Nurse Jenks' turn of night-duty was not due for three days, and I was resignedly prepared to twiddle my thumbs for those three days, while Jane, on tenterhooks to get on with the job, half-suggested taking another nurse into our confidence. But I vetoed that idea, feeling that it might well be that Nurse Jenks' presence was essential to the appearance of the "Snake", as a medium is necessary for the production of ectoplasm—and as it happened, by a stroke of luck for us, on the very next night following the conversation, the nurse taking night-duty in "Snow-White" developed a bad cold and was forbidden ward-duty for fear of infecting the children. So Nurse Jenks at once volunteered to take her place, and we laid our plans.

I waited until the Orphanage was wrapped in sleep and then, treading softly so as not to awaken either the children or any of the staff—who would certainly have stared to see a strange man wandering about the Home at so late an hour!—I was conducted by Jane once more through the labyrinth of stairs and corridors until we reached "Snow-White". My little friend, Nurse Jenks, was already sitting behind the screen that was drawn round the fire, knitting busily away at some small garment or other—she spent much of her time, my cousin told me, making frocks or knitting woollies for the children that were her craze—and she rose to her feet at once as we entered, with a warning glance towards the rows of little blue-quilted beds, each with its humped outline showing a sleeping child.

I whispered a greeting, Jane smiled good-bye to us both and disappeared, and I came to the fire and warmed my hands for a moment—despite the unusually sunny weather it was only May, and the nights were cool enough to make a fire welcome. Nurse Jenks motioned to me to take her chair, but I shook my head.

"Thank you so much—but no," I said in a whisper. "I'm going to watch beside the window—to try if I can see where It comes from when it enters the room. Is there a chair near there—good!" as she nodded. "Now one thing I want you to do.

If It comes, let It get up on to the bed, will you? I want to see what It wants to do—you need not fear! I will step in before It has time to harm the child, even if It intends harm—which, as you know, I don't think it does. Do you understand? ”

She drew a long breath.

“Yes!” she whispered back. “It'll be difficult, because it looks so awfully sinister snaking up the bed—but I'll do what you say. Come—I'll put the chair for you.”

We tiptoed down the long room, a wary eye on the rows of little sleepers, but though twice my shoes creaked on the shining boards, and when Nurse Jenks pulled out my chair from a corner she banged it by accident against the wainscot, there was no sign of anybody awaking.

I arranged my chair well to one side of the large window so that I was partially hidden by the folds of the curtains, and we settled down to watch.

It was about eleven-thirty, and a beautiful spring night, with the sky a calm sea of violet glass loosely scattered with stars like a celestial archipelago, and a slim crescent moon sailing, shiplike, indifferently among them, while below, the massed trees that hid the wall between the Home and Drury Place loomed black as a Chinese painting, and the wide stretch of lawn was silver-white in the clear light of the room.

Silence fell upon the room, only broken by the faint regular click of Nurse Jenks' knitting-needles, an occasional “crish” as the coals on the fire settled one against another, and a distant hoot from a stray owl in the clustered trees far below. Time passed slowly, and I was feeling that I had sat in that exceedingly hard chair for several centuries and was wondering (as I always do during such vigils, though Heaven knows I ought to be used to them by now!) how on earth I was going to keep awake until Something happened, when a stifled gasp from Nurse Jenks made me realize that I must have dozed off for a minute, and I was instantly awake, furious with myself for my weakness. For there, coming in at the window, was the Snake!

I sat still as a stone—above all things I did not want to disturb or startle the Thing, whatever it was, that had elected to make such strange nocturnal visits to the baby now sleeping quietly in its bed amongst its fellows. But even as the thought crossed my mind I heard a faint sound, and knew that the child was no longer sleeping quietly. From far down the long room there came a little whimpering, plaintive, restless murmur, and as I peered

down the semi-lit dusk of the room I could see that the baby known as Little Pickles had changed her position. When I entered the room she had lain facing the door, curled up so deeply under the clothes that only one absurd little plait sticking up on the pillow betrayed her presence in the bed at all; she now lay facing the window with both small arms thrown outside the quilt, and her face, clearly seen upon the pillow, turned towards the wide strip of moonlight that showed between the curtains. I got an odd fleeting impression that the baby's attitude was, so to speak, welcoming . . . but by now the Snake was slithering down the wall from the windowsill to the floor, and I had no time to spare for staring at anything else.

My first impression was to feel how extremely accurate had been Nurse Jenks' description—for indeed the Appearance was far more like an elephant's trunk or the tentacle of an octopus than any snake that ever lived! It was grey-white and semi-solid—that is, it was not *quite* transparent, as many ghosts are. One could see it quite plainly as a long, rippling, tube-like shape, denser in the centre than at the edges, where it was blurred like a thing seen out of focus. But there was not the remotest sign of a head or eyes, or the narrowing of a neck of any sort—the “head” end was the smallest part, and from thence it grew in thickness steadily until it was about the size of a man's thigh. It palpably could not see, for it waved about blindly, gropingly, yet all the time “feeling” its way unerringly down the room towards where little Colette lay sleeping. . . . Its progress was slow, and measuring the distance that still remained between it and Colette's bed, I pulled aside a fold of the curtain at my elbow and peered out—and all but gave a startled exclamation. For below, right across the moonlit lawn as far as the belt of massed trees that divided Drury Place and the Orphanage from each other, lay a dim length, like a great cable that was just visible in the moonlight. The Snake! It trailed down from the window and right across the lawn, to disappear amongst the trees—why, it was a creature fantastically, impossibly huge, longer than the longest snake Münchausen ever encountered in his wildest dreams! With my head in a whirl I glanced towards Little Pickles' bed—and saw that the long grey tentacle had reached the foot of the bed and was slowly gliding upwards. Now it had reached the top and was inching itself along the quilt to where the child lay, her arms still flung outside the bedclothes, her whimpering now stilled, a faint, happy little smile on her face. And then . . .

Nurse Jenks' cry of horror rang through the room, and in a flash quicker than her cry, the Thing had vanished. Recoiled upon itself as the tentacles of a sea-anemone will recoil when touched by an exploratory finger . . . and there was nothing! Nothing at all. . . .

As the children, startled by Nurse Jenks' cry, began to stir and murmur, I rushed to the window and leant out—but, as I expected, the lawn below was utterly flat and empty. The weird, cable-like length that had stretched across it had vanished like a dream, and as I turned back into the room, Nurse Jenks was at my elbow, agitated, tearful, with the baby Colette clutched tightly in her arms.

"Oh, doctor—oh, doctor!" She still retained enough sense of her duty towards her other charges to speak too low for them to hear, but it was plain that she was greatly shaken. "I saw it—I saw it—it stretched itself out upon the bed and fastened itself upon her solar plexus, like a sort of awful leech—and I couldn't help it, I *had* to scream! Oh, God, what if it's hurt her—what if it has?"

All the time she was fumbling madly with the child's night-dress—she wore one of those flannel things with legs and upper half in one that are the very devil to undo—and as she tore it open my cousin's level voice came behind us.

"That's all right, nurse! Pull yourself together and get the other children soothed off to sleep again . . . tell them that Pickles had a bad dream and called out, and that it was that that startled them, and then take some aspirin yourself and sit down quietly by the fire and read. It's all over for to-night, I'm sure. Isn't it, Miles?"

"Quite! All over—these psychic manifestations rarely renew themselves when they've once been broken off," I said. "All right, nurse. Don't worry, I'll look after Little Pickles. I'm positive she's all right, though I don't blame you for feeling upset."

The girl smiled a rather watery smile and turned to soothe her other charges while I examined little Colette's solar plexus as she lay half asleep in Jane's arms. But there was no mark at all on the smooth little pink stomach—which fact went to prove the impression I already had that the Snake was either in itself harmless, or else that if it were capable of doing harm, it meant no harm to the child. If the Appearance had been a psychic vampire of a vicious or evil type, there would have been a faint red

patch upon the skin—but there was no sign of any such stigma on the plump, healthy little stomach I was prodding! Either the Thing had been interrupted before it had had time really to get down to work . . . or else it was not a vampire in the true sense of the word at all, certainly not an evil one. If not, what could it be, and what, above all, was the attraction that lured it to the child? Anxiously Jane and I discussed the exciting events of the evening as ten minutes later we sat over two cups of steaming cocoa in her sitting-room.

“You see,” I said, “to-night has proved two things—both very important. One, whatever the Appearance is and whatever it means, it is not inimical to the child it visits. And, two, the child herself knows and welcomes it—in her sleep.”

“That seems to me simply extraordinary,” said Jane. “But if you say so—I suppose it must be so.”

“I do say so,” I averred. “I noticed that on the Thing’s entry, that child turned to greet it! It lay with its arms thrown out in an attitude of welcome, and those little cooing noises it was making were not the noises of a child either frightened or puzzled. They were welcoming, happy noises—extraordinary as it sounds! Little Pickles was sound asleep—but all the same, her *inner* self was awake, and knew and was *glad* to see the intruder, though it frightened poor Nurse Jenks so horribly! And the instinct of a child is a true instinct. They are still too close on the Other Side for their psychic senses to have become clouded and perverted, as too often our own are in later life. If this weird Thing were evil, this child would have sensed it in her sleep and shrunk and screamed—but she welcomed it! Therefore it is not only something harmless, but it is something that she knows and . . . I would say . . . loves. . . .”

“But this seems *too* extraordinary!” said Jane with wrinkled brows. “A ghost-snake comes to a child at nights, and the child knows and welcomes it . . . it sounds utterly mad to me!”

“It won’t when we’ve unravelled the whole tangle,” I said, draining my second cup of cocoa. “The next step is—Drury Place.”

“Drury Place?” gaped Jane with round eyes.

I laughed.

“My dear, whatever the reason, this Thing comes from Drury Place. I tell you, I saw its length trailing out from under the trees just where the gate is—it must have come from there

across the lawn to the house, and up the side of the house into the dormitory. . . ."

"Don't!" said Jane, and shuddered as she put her cup down. "I shall never sleep again, I think! I saw *It* from the door—I waited, you know, in the corridor, with the door ajar, in case you needed help. I never saw anything so—so hideously sinister-looking."

"It's only hideous because we don't understand it," I said. "My next move, then, is to lie in wait in Drury Place—and see what I can see!"

Thereafter I spent several chilly and boring nights lurking in the massed shrubs and bushes of Drury Place, on the further side of the wooden door in the wall between the two properties. Jane still possessed a key to this door, and it gave me a mild sense of amusement to realize how furious Mrs. Drury would have been had she dreamt that the door forbidden to her had been opened and used by me, not once but several times, during the ensuing week! I prowled about the garden cocking curious eyes at the windows, wondering who slept in which room, but all without avail, until at last one night, when I was curled in the shelter of a giant clump of laurel, wondering how much longer I was going to have to waste in these, at the moment, fruitless night-watches, I sensed that something was happening—and lo, from the direction of the house, along the path between the bushes that led to the door in the wall, I saw the dim grey-white length of the Snake appearing!

It was gliding along, supple, silent, its blind head—if it *was* a head—raised about a foot or so from the ground, waving from side to side as if groping its way along, and though I am no stranger, as you may imagine, to curious and wonderful sights in my psychic work, yet when I saw it go past me straight *through* the door in the wall as though it were a palpably solid form and the thick, green-painted wooden door a shadow, instead of the other way round, I had a queer thrill, as I always do! The matter of which we take such heed was simply not even noticed by this strange visitor from the Other Side. . . .

I sent a rueful mental thought towards poor Nurse Jenks, keeping her vigil, as I was sure she was doing, in "Snow-White", and creeping as softly as possible through the bushes, tried to see from whence the Snake was coming. Its length seemed interminable—I could see the cloudy, semi-tangible shape of it trail-

ing along the path through the bushes—and then, as I emerged into a clearer space round the house itself, I saw that it came from the house! From the window of a room that faced the Orphanage . . . a room on the first floor with a bowshaped window and a shallow stone balcony outside it. It was curious and wonderful to see the shape of the Snake, like a huge fire-hose, hanging from the half-open window to the ground below—it was even in the moonlight still palpable enough to look almost solid, at the centre at least, though the edges were cloudy and uncertain, like a thing out of focus. It was alive, vital, palpitant, yet I knew that if I thrust my hand through it I would feel nothing . . . though then the Thing would vanish, I should have broken the vibrations that formed it as a flung stone breaks the smooth stillness of a fresh pool. Though I had every intention of “breaking” it before it reached the Home, for the sake of poor little Nurse Jenks, waiting agitatedly in “Snow-White”, I watched it for a thrilling moment, for I knew now what it was, and felt awed, amazed, sensing the strength of the subconscious will, the love and the longing that had sent it forth. And *who* had sent it? That remained for me to find out, and it was imperative that I *should* find it out—for the solution of the problem which, now I knew, was of even greater importance to the baby Colette, and to one other, than it was to my cousin Jane.

I rose brusquely from my hiding-place in the bushes, and at once, as I expected, sensing an alien vibration, the Thing quivered, recoiled—and vanished. But my investigation was not yet complete. I had to know who slept in the room from whence it had come—who had sent it forth. I stepped out into the moonlight and surveyed the balcony—could I possibly, without waking anybody in the house, swing myself up with the aid, first, of the garden-roller that was conveniently drawn up by the window, and second, by the thick woody stems of the old wistaria that grew heavily all along the balcony rail? I simply had to try, and fortunately, thanks to being lightly built and pretty active, I succeeded—and in a few moments I was standing close to the window, which was open. I listened eagerly . . . yes, my luck was in! Somebody was mumbling, talking in his sleep . . . a man's voice. The Colonel's! It was Colonel Milward's room. . . .

With a feeling of definite satisfaction I climbed down from the balcony and took my way back to my bed. I had seen the Snake, I knew what it was and who sent it forth. The last question to

be solved was—why? The problem was not cleared up yet—but I had taken two vastly important steps towards it.

I made my report to my cousin Jane the next day, and her blue eyes widened with amazed interest.

"Colonel Milward!" she repeated. "But this is simply freakish, Miles! He *adores* children! Wouldn't hurt one of them for anything . . . oh, of course, I forgot. You say this thing, whatever it is, isn't a thing that wants to hurt." She brooded. "Though it's difficult to grasp that when it looks so sinister!"

"Anything from the Other Side is apt to look sinister to people who don't understand it and its reason for appearing," I told her. "But look here, what *does* emerge is that there is a strong psychic link between the Colonel and this waif-and-stray you call Little Pickles! What the link is I don't know, but that is plain—and when out of the body, in the condition of sleep, both these souls know it! The man reaches out towards the child, and the child knows and welcomes the man . . . what you call the 'Snake' is the psychic tentacle, the 'cord' that connects two people known and dear to each other. If you had psychic sight you would see that husbands and wives, lovers, sisters and brothers, parents and children who truly love each other are linked by a sort of psychic umbilical cord. . . ."

Jane interrupted half impatiently.

"Yes, yes. I can understand that. People who are *connected* . . . but, my dear Miles, the Colonel hasn't any connection with this little waif-and-stray? He saw her for the first time the other night when she wandered into my sitting-room, the little mischief."

"I know," I said. "But even if there's no link of this life between them—and we don't know *that* yet, you yourself say you don't know where half these poor little souls come from—that does not mean there is no connection between their souls, their *older* selves? There may be a very strong connection there that dates from some previous life. A connection that is still so strong that in sleep it reaches out blindly, gropingly, hungering to renew the link that once existed unbroken between them. That's what I've got to find out—whether the link belongs to past lives or to the life of to-day. Of course, it *may* be both, for all I know. Indeed, from the strength of the manifestation I should think it is."

"Are you sure it is a *right* link?" objected Jane. "I've heard

of older people fastening on children so as to make psychic slaves of them—live on their vitality, I mean, or renew the power they had over them in some past life.”

“I know what you mean,” I said. “But I’m quite positive this is a *right* link, so to speak. If it had been a wrong one, one of black magic for instance—a magician reaching out after a one-time pupil to draw her back to him and his influence—I should have sensed it as being evil, as the child would in her sleep, just as she would have sensed the evil of it had it been a vampiric attack. But she *didn’t*—she smiled and was happy when the Snake drew near! . . . No. These two belonged together at one time, and I suspect the Powers are trying to bring them together again. I must do all I can to help them.”

Jane giggled suddenly.

“My, I would like to see Mrs. Drury’s face if her brother suddenly adopted an Orphanage baby of unknown parentage!” she murmured. “But I see what you mean, of course, Miles. But how on earth are you going to find all this out?”

“D’you think it would be possible to get hold of a bit of the Colonel’s hair?” I asked. “If I could do that, and take a lock from the baby’s head, and use them in a certain ritual I know, I could soon find out whether there is or isn’t any connection between them in this life.”

“Now you *are* asking!” said Jane thoughtfully. “He’s certainly got quite nice thick hair for a man of his age—but dear me, how is one going to get hold of a lock?” She giggled again, more like the girl I remembered than a middle-aged, grey-haired woman. “The time’s gone by, worse luck, when I might have vamped him and begged a lock as a keepsake! What on earth can we do?”

“I know,” I said. “You’re rehearsing for a children’s pantomime sort of thing for this annual party you told me about and you were worried as to who would be the King because the doctor said he was too busy. Why not get the Colonel to do it? It only means sitting on a throne and wearing robes and a makeshift wig while the children dance round him—I saw Nurse Jenks rehearsing them the other day. Tell her to rig him up with some lengths of ravelled wool as a wig, and snip off a bit of hair on the sly while she’s doing it. I’m sure she can do it.”

“I think I’ll be able to arrange that all right, if he’ll play—or rather if his sister will let him!” said Jane thoughtfully.

“I think you’ll find he’ll do it, sister or no sister,” I said. “You

tell him that Little Pickles is playing the Palace Baby and has to sit on the King's knee, and he's the only person you feel can really handle her. That'll fetch him—you see! ”

I was quite right. Jane's little note of appeal to the Colonel brought him hotfoot to the Orphanage that very afternoon for a rehearsal, without, I learnt afterwards, even waiting to see what Mrs. Drury said.

Little Nurse Jenks managed the big man and her bunch of obstreperous charges most adroitly. She had hastily rigged up a temporary wig with beard attached made of wool on the pretext that the sooner the new actor became accustomed to playing the part of a bewigged character the better, arranged it on his rather reluctant head, draped him in a blue quilt for a robe, gave him a poker to act as a sceptre, and guided little Colette to sit on his knee . . . though “guided ” is scarcely the word, as the moment the child toddled into the room she made a bee-line for the strange King. I was interested to note that she knew him at once despite his smothering draperies and head-swathings of red wool! For the rest of the rehearsal she sat contentedly on his knee as good as gold, the man plainly as proud as Punch, so absorbed in his small charge that I doubt if he even noticed when Nurse Jenks, in removing the absurd woollen “wig”, made pretence that it had caught in his hair and that she must use her scissors to get it clear. . . .

And that night after dinner—what time I have no doubt Mrs. Drury was giving her brother a piece of her mind for acting without consulting her—I opened an envelope handed to me hurriedly by my valuable *aide*, Nurse Jenks, and examined the two scraps of hair that lay inside. One, a soft dark lock cut from a baby's head and, two, a grizzled tuft of reddish-brown shot with grey. . . .

Alone in my room that night I sealed the envelope carefully with a certain seal, marked each corner with the Sign of Hathiel, who concerns himself particularly with the relationship of souls one to the other, and after turning out all the lights but a single small amber-coloured lamp that I always carry with me, I stripped myself to the skin, put on a dressing-gown, and lay down on my bed with the sealed envelope held flat between my folded hands. I lay there motionless, and through my mind, quiescent but not entranced, there began to pass all manner of strange fragmentary visions, all of which were, I knew, connected with the Colonel and with the little child towards whom he was so strangely drawn.

Pictures of far countries, of dark forests and swamps, of deserts and seas, of ancient races and long-forgotten customs, of people dark-skinned, copper, fair or yellow—indeed these two had known each other, in one relationship or another, down many ages! But none of the visions paused and crystallized into definite shape as it were—it was as though I was being shown, but sketchily and rapidly, a vast cinema-reel of past incarnations that began far back in the early history of Man and had been continued down to the present day. The speed of the “film” continued without a pause, the time coming steadily nearer and nearer down the ages. In Babylon, Greece, China, Egypt, I saw these two, incarnating sometimes as men, sometimes as women, but always together . . . then came a flash of Renaissance Italy, with the dark-haired baby I knew a lovely young woman and the grey-haired man slim, ardent, her lover . . . another flash of Revolutionary France, and a pair of young aristocrats, brother and sister, facing the howling mob hand-in-hand, undaunted in the lumbering tumbril that was carrying them to the guillotine . . . then suddenly I saw a shabby little sitting-room in a modern flat, and the grey-haired soldier I knew, watching a sleeping baby in a crib before the gasfire. To-day—I had come back to to-day! I woke, and when I opened the envelope I saw that the two scraps of hair had become entwined together in so wonderful a way that by no possible means could they ever be disentangled! Closely interwoven together into a tiny “pad” they lay, so that one could not tell where the dark hair ended and the short grey-shot hairs began . . . entwined as were the lives of the two to whom the locks belonged. . . .

Jane’s amazement and interest when I told her the result of my investigation was touching, but when I begged her to help me to trace the whereabouts of the baby Colette’s mother she shook her head sadly, and told me she was afraid there was little hope of doing that. The child had been rescued with several others from the ruins of a bombed building beneath which a good many people, including many foreigners, had been sheltering. Jane could give me the address where it had happened all right, but so shattering had been the devastation that many bodies had been literally blown into fragments—and Colette had not been the only child saved from the wreck of whose parents there remained no recognizable trace.

But I had a profound confidence in the talisman of plaited hair that I bore safely within a sealed envelope in my breast-pocket,

and writing down the address, "Excelsior Buildings, Flagg Street, Camden Town", I went up to London by an early train the following day.

Naturally, by this time—a year later—the worst of the damage had long been cleared away, and where a substantial block of buildings had once housed the offices and personnel of the Excelsior Assurance Company, was an E.W.S. "static water" tank, in whose dark surface the desolate pitted walls and chimneys that rose high on each side was reflected grimly enough. Many of the houses and shops in Flagg Street and round about had been badly blasted, both at that time and several subsequent times, and were shored up with props and boards, the gaps in walls and glassless windows filled in with cardboard or slate or even sacking; but valiantly undefeated, the life of the people continued!

I wandered around the streets, amazed and impressed by the indomitable courage and good cheer of the common people of England. "Business as usual" despite all the horrors of war! If the greengrocer's shop had gone, he rigged up a stall in the roadway and continued to sell his vegetables; the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, the man who sold milk and the man who sold pots and pans, all alike continued to conduct their trade as best they could in their shops if they were standing, if not, on the pavement outside, putting up cheerfully with the most appalling living conditions, only thankful to be alive and well. . . .

I found many of them willing enough to discuss the bombing of the "Ex" as they called it—it still remained, after the lapse of a year, and several subsequent bombardments, the most formidable piece of devastation that had befallen that neighbourhood. The Excelsior Assurance Company had allowed the basement, which was an extensive one, to be used as a shelter, as shelters were scarce in that neighbourhood and the building was a modern one and considered likely to be proof against almost any form of bombing. But that night the Luftwaffe had used landmines. . . .

"I'll never forget it," declared a buxom woman, standing at the doorway of a tiny shop labelled "Madame Celestine" that sold cheap lingerie, stockings, ribbons and the like. "Madame Celestine" herself wore a dirty pink overall and plimsolls on her bare feet, and spoke with a rich and fruity Cockney accent, but she was a handsome, blowsy, good-hearted creature and

frankly interested in my quest, about which I had been perfectly frank, of course. It is the only way with your Londoner—take him into your confidence.

“Thought the end of the world’d come, I did—and so it *had* for a lot of poor souls. There was close on two hundred there, mister, and less’n thirty dragged out alive, and most of ’em children. Saved by being under some steps or somethin’ of the sort. Kid you’re talking about must a’ bin among ’em.”

“I expect so—but no trace of her mother was ever found, I understand,” I said. “I’m trying to see if I can find any relatives of hers, or anybody that knows anything about her. Worst of it is the child doesn’t know her name—at least only a Christian name. Colette.”

“Madame Celestine” shook a doubtful head.

“The p’lice went froo the place askin’ about everybody soon arter it ’appened,” she said. “There was several kids they couldn’t find nothing at all about, and quite a lot of bodies took out when they dug down that were so messed up you couldn’t recognize ’em, nor know if they was man or woman sometimes, poor devils!”

This was discouraging, and yet I knew I was growing “hot” as they used to say in a child’s game I used to play when I was a youngster . . . and “hot” actually was the word! I could feel a glow like that of a tiny hot-water bottle just over my heart where lay the envelope containing the entwined hairs. . . .

I pulled out a snapshot I had taken of little Colette and showed it to her.

“That’s the baby,” I said. “She’s a year older now, of course, but it’s a very vivid little face. I should think anybody who knew her would remember her. Do you?”

The woman studied the snap closely, but to my disappointment shook her head.

“’S not a kid I know,” she said. “But I tell you what.” She eyed me interestedly. “Leave it with me an hour or two, mister, will yeh? I got to go to market, and I’ll show it rahnd to a few of me pals there. They may remember ’er. But y’know, we got such a lot o’ strangers tricklin’ dahn ’ere from time to time cos they’d been bombed aht, that we didn’t know ’arf of ’em.” She studied the snap again and chuckled—it was a “close-up” of Little Pickles taken when she was sunbathing on a rug, naked as the day she was born, with her two impertinent tails of hair sticking up like interrogation points each side of her small round face.

"Coo—bet she's a comic, that kid! All right, mister, you leave it t'me and I'll see what I can find out."

Nothing pleases your Cockney better than to be entrusted with a mission that gives him or her a sense of importance. So well content, I retreated, after arranging a time and place at which to meet, feeling that if there were anything to be found, the odds were that "Madame Celestine" would find it. . . . And I was not mistaken! When I turned into the dusty little street again, about three hours later, she was standing at the door of her shop looking out for me, and beside her stood a lean, suspicious-looking woman with a shabby shawl clutched about her shoulders and a man's tweed cap skewered to her tightly-screwed hair, holding a lanky little girl in a smeared green frock by one hand. As I came up to the little group I was greeted by a definite glare of hostility from the little woman who stood beside the child. It was evident that she regarded me with the deepest distrust, but I am not unused to handling that attitude, as you know, and I smiled at her with all the charm of which I am capable as my fat friend introduced us.

"Naow, this is the gent'man, Jenny—name of Gratton, mister. Missis Gratton—and don't you get thinkin' he's a wrong 'un or after anything he shouldn't, see? I wouldn't 'a' spoken to 'im if I 'adn't known 'e was all right."

The little woman sniffed a doubtful sniff, but said nothing, and the little girl stared up at me from where she stood beside her mother with the shrewd appraisal of the London slum-child. She was an alert-looking, sharp-faced little soul, and her bright dark eyes studied me curiously as "Madame Celestine" went on.

"Gawn naow, Lizzie—tell the gent what you know about the kid in the photygraph I showed you. You knew 'er, you said."

"Yerse. 'S a wop kid," said the child called Lizzie promptly. "Come dahn 'ere wiv its muvver on'y abaht a munce before the big smash." She jerked an expressive thumb in the direction of the E.W.S. tank, one-time Excelsior Buildings. "Come dahn wiv a bunch of uvver wops, cos they'd been busted aht o' their 'omes, an' a munce later—*wham!* They was killed, every one of 'em."

"This child wasn't killed, though," I said, accepting the snapshot from the fat hand of "Madame Celestine". "I suppose you thought she was?"

"We didn't know 'oo was saved and 'oo wasn't," brusquely

interpolated the woman called Jenny. "We was pretty well blasted to 'ell ourselves that night. Me and me 'usband we lost our shop front, and 'arf the 'ouses in the street come down, and my Liz 'ere was 'urt and took orf to 'ospital."

"Madame Celestine" sighed and shook her head.

"S'right," she said. "Most of us was too busy scrounging what we could out of our own mess to 'ave time to ask about them poor devils killed when the 'Ex' shelter went, unless they was some 'un belongin' to us. But as Liz says, a lot of 'em was foreigners just come dahn, and they kep' themselves to themselves a lot—some of 'em didn't speak English, and we didn't even know the names of 'arf of 'em. Made it proper tough for the p'lice when they came arskin' about 'oo was killed and all that."

"You can't tell me this little girl's name then?" I said to the child Liz—and a sense of disappointment seized me. "But in that case how did you recognize her? Are you sure you *do* recognize her?"

The child grinned.

"Couldn't 'a' been anybody but Nicky, from them plaits," she said. "'Er mother always tied 'er 'air up in them two plaits."

Nicky? I felt more puzzled than ever . . . and yet that warm feeling in my waistcoat pocket was still there, warmer than ever, so I knew I must be on the right track.

"Do tell me," I said, "all you know about this child and—if you knew her—her mother?"

The child Liz looked a little uncertainly at her mother, and Mrs. Gratton scowled.

"She wasn't a right sort of a woman," she growled. "And a 'Roman' too. If I'd 'a' known I wouldn't 'ave let my Liz speak to 'er . . . 'er with a baby and all, and no wedding-ring!" She favoured her offspring with a specially sour glare. "I didn't even know my kid 'ad bin mixin' 'erself up with them foreigners till Liz come outer the 'ospital and started a hullabaloo about where was Nicky and 'er ma?" The child looked sullenly stubborn as she went on virtuously, "I've always been one for keepin' meself respectable. The idea o' my kid pallin' up with no-good women and their bahstuds . . ."

"But listen," I said gently, "whatever the poor soul did, she's dead now, and shouldn't we try and forget the past? Anyway, it's not for her sake, but for the poor baby left all alone that I'm mak-

ing these enquiries—and for the baby's sake I'm sure you won't mind your little girl Liz answering my questions, will you? After all, Liz was your baby once."

Jenny bristled.

"Ar!" she began virtuously. "That's different. I'm a respectable married woman, I am! 'Tain't the same. . . ."

But by this time my friend "Madame Celestine", who had been swelling with hard-held speech for fully five minutes, broke off impatiently.

"Ow, come orf it, Jenny!" she cried impatiently. "Didn't we 'ammer all this aht before I got you to come along and bring Liz? Come orf it, and let's get on telling the gent'man what 'e wants to know . . . whatever 'er muvver's done you don't want to tike it outer the baby, do yer? Go on, Liz—show that card you got."

Reluctantly the child pulled out a battered card from the pocket of her grubby frock and held it out to me.

It was a cheap and gaudy-coloured postcard of the Virgin and Child surrounded with a border of flowers picked out with paint, gilt and tinsel—the sort of thing that is given away to the pious poor at Roman Catholic festivals, saints' days and so on—and at first I stared at it, puzzled, while the warm patch over my heart where the sealed envelope rested throbbed and glowed like a miniature fire. I knew by that time that I had found what I needed—and when I turned it over and saw some lines of writing on the back, writing in a neat feminine hand, I knew I had come to the end of my journey. On the back of the card was written a date and the following pathetic little prayer:

"Sainte Vierge, Mère de Jésus, priez pour moi, et pour ma pauvre petite fille, Nicolette.

MARIE-LOUISE POULAIN
February 1941."

"But, my *child*!" I stared at Liz. "Why on earth didn't you hand this to the police when they were trying to find out the names of those killed?"

But even as I spoke I realized what had happened. Of course! Liz herself had been injured in the disaster and conveyed to hospital with other wounded, and when she came out the enquiry was over. I turned to her mother.

"You know," I said, "when your little girl came back from hospital you should surely have gone to the authorities with this

card and given it in so that they could add this poor woman's name to the list of dead?"

I caught a guilty look on Liz's face and her mother's lips tightened.

"Mebbe you'll tell me 'ow I could 'a' gorn to the p'lice when I didn't know till this very moment my kid 'ad that card," she retorted. "A *Roman* thing—I'd 'a' collared it and tore it to bits if I'd known she'd 'a' 'ad it, and given 'er a leatherin' for takin' it!"

Liz tossed a defiant young head.

"That's why I didn't show it yer—I knew you wouldn't 'a' let me keep it," she retorted. "I liked 'er—and the kid was prime fun! I useter 'elp 'er barth the kid sometimes—mad abaht barthin' and washin' she was, though moster them wops didn't uster bother—and I see this card stuck up one night in 'er room when I'd been 'elpin' 'er, and she said I c'd keep it for a bit. It was pretty—an' I don' care if it is Roman."

"Where did she have a room?" I asked quickly.

But Liz shook her head.

"'At's gone too," she said briefly, "over a baker's shop it was. But the shop went down the same night the 'Ex' went, and the baker and 'is wife wiv it." Her sharp little face clouded. "I'd only meant to keep the card one night and give it back to 'er the next time I see 'er—and that night it all 'appened, and when I come outer 'ospital it was still in my pocket. And I di'n't show it to Ma cos I knew she'd 'a' torn it up like she says." Her bright eyes snapped defiance at her frowning mother. "I wouldn't 'a' shown it now, but Mrs. 'Iggs said I gotter tell all I could to 'elp the baby." She gave an unexpected little sniff that was half a sob. "And I don't care if she *was* a Roman and not married—I liked 'er. She useter ask me was I a Roman and say that 'er religion was the only thing she had to live for . . . that and Nicky. . . ."

"Nicky" . . . now I understood. Of course Nicky—Nicolette—that would come more easily to the tongue of a slum child than Colette, her mother's name for her. . . .

I turned to her mother.

"Did you know anything about this girl, the mother of this baby at all? I'm prepared to pay well, you know, for any information!"

The discovery that there was money to be made by talking loosened the lady's tongue considerably, and I discovered that

despite her disapproval of Marie-Louise Poulain, she had been sufficiently curious about her to note various things about her, her dark, quiet good-looks, her superior manners, and above all the fact that though she had come down with only a bundle of things for herself and the child, apparently they had been things of better quality and far better made than is usual amongst the working classes—and all made by herself. Grudgingly Jenny admitted that in her opinion she “could ‘a’ made a decent living if she’d lived, doing sewing for the big shops . . .”

“I’d ‘a’ offered ‘er a job in *my* shop,” said “Madame Celestine” regretfully, “if I’d only known. Pore kid! Now I sorter remember ‘er—smallish and dark, with ‘er ‘air very neatly done and always keepin’ ‘erself to ‘erself. But there, she was only in the districk about a coupla weeks before she was took, and—we thought—the kid with ‘er, pore little soul.”

“Well,” I said, “the baby is perfectly well and happy, I can tell you that, and growing up along with a lot of other children in a nice Home in the country. And if you will let me keep this card so that I can trace her relations—I know I can, if I have this card—I’ll not only make a handsome contribution, Mrs. Gratton, towards the cost of restocking or refurnishing your house or shop, whichever it is, but I’ll do the same for this good lady Mrs. Higgs who has brought about our meeting”—at which “Madame Celestine” bestowed an enormous smile of gratification upon me—“and I’ll present Liz with a nice new frock and undertake, when I can arrange transport for her, to take her down to the Home for a day and let her see Nicky in the flesh for herself. How about it?”

Both ladies expressed themselves as more than satisfied, and Liz, though she pulled something of a long face at having to give up her precious card, at last—on my pointing out that her mother would not let her keep it anyway!—decided that a new frock and a country outing were a fair exchange, and with the card tucked carefully in the same pocket with the envelope containing the two locks of hair, I managed to catch the last train down to Abbots’ Holme, where over a late supper I recounted with a shade of pardonable triumph my day’s successful doings to my cousin.

The mystery was solved—the child Nicolette Poulain was, I was convinced, the child of Colonel Milward and of a young Frenchwoman called Marie-Louise Poulain! How and what and where and all about it remained to be cleared up—but somehow I did not think this would be difficult. The link between father

and daughter, so strangely met, was already so strong that I was convinced I would have little difficulty in tying up the ends of my problem—I proposed to carry the Colonel by “shock attack”, and that as soon as possible.

Jane nodded and smiled as she answered.

“He’s been here again! No, there was no rehearsal, but he came unasked to see if he could take ‘my baby’, as he already calls her, ‘for a walk’ . . . at the age of four! Isn’t that like a man? I told him he could play with her on the lawn if he liked, or sit beside her crib while she had her afternoon sleep . . . and believe it or not, that is just what he did! Sat patiently for a good hour beside her crib under the trees, where I let the babies have their siesta on fine days, and all the time she slept she was holding his finger, fast as a little leech! The poor man must have been dreadfully stiff when she awakened, but he wouldn’t move till she did, though Nurse Jenks suggested he could withdraw his finger while she was asleep without waking her. . . . ‘No,’ he said, ‘I wouldn’t like her to wake and find me not there.’ Oh, isn’t it marvellous to see the strength of that love-link? When I think of that strange sight, that Snake undulating into the dormitory in search of its own, led by the sheer instinct of love that told it its beloved was near, I am no longer afraid as I was when I saw it. I feel humbled, awed . . . just amazed that I have been allowed to see such a wonder of the world. . . .”

I kissed her, for there were tears in her dear kind eyes.

“My dear Jane, you are an angel and you’re doing an angel’s work,” I said. “And to-morrow, all being well, you’ll see the finish of this story and these two brought together . . . to the wrath and dismay of Mrs. Drury, I am sure, but who cares? And now . . . I’m going to bed!”

I sent a private note to Colonel Milward after breakfast the next morning, saying that I had discovered some very interesting matters concerning the delightful little girl Colette, in whom he was so much interested—could he make it convenient to call and see me about six o’clock? A prompt message came back saying that he would certainly call, and after administering tea to us in her usual graceful fashion Jane withdrew on the excuse of having work to attend to, and Tatie having cleared away the tea things, I drew out from my pocket the coloured postcard of the Virgin and the Child and, holding it out to the Colonel, asked him bluntly if he had ever seen it before. His slight start and pause

were sufficient answers, but when I bade him turn it over and look at the back, he turned as white as a sheet, his eyes bulged and he drew a sharp breath of startled amazement, seemingly unable to speak for a moment or so. I watched him keenly as at last he spoke, in a shaky whisper.

"My God . . . my *God!* Where . . . *where* did you find this?"

I told him all I knew, all I had gathered in my wanderings about the scene of the disaster, which I now found added up to a fairly coherent story. In company with a good many others, mostly foreigners, little Colette had been brought to Camden Town in March 1941 by her mother, a young Frenchwoman, dark and slim and refined; they had been bombed out of wherever they had previously been living—and alas! before a month had passed, disaster had again overtaken the mother and child, and this time finally. The mother had been killed, but the child rescued . . . and now by sheer chance (or rather *not* by chance, as I knew I had been "led" by the Powers operating through the twin locks of hair) I had a year later discovered this battered postcard, the only scrap of evidence that proved Colette's identity and that of her mother, Marie-Louise Poulain.

"You know . . . yes, you *must* know, of course . . . that she's my child. My own child!" muttered the man, staring at the lines of writing that implored the Virgin's blessing upon Marie-Louise Poulain and her baby. "Marie-Louise's handwriting—my Marie-Louise—God, I'd know it anywhere, anywhere!" His voice broke as he clutched my arm. "Pennoyer, you don't know what you've done for me—you don't know! I've been like a madman these last two years! I've searched high and low, I've advertised, I've poured money out on private detectives, anything to try and find her, my little girl and her mother, my blessed, blessed Marie-Louise!" Tears were running down his lined face, and his strong hands were shaking. "We weren't married—we couldn't be. I had a wife when we met, though I hadn't seen her for years. But we *could* have got married later . . . if only she'd waited a little. She left me, you know—vanished, taking the child, when Colette was about a year old—and only a few months after she vanished, my wife died! The bloody irony of it! We could have got married, made our own home, been happy—but she'd vanished and I didn't know where she'd gone! I could never find out. . . . God, what I've suffered wondering where she was. . . ." His glazed eyes held mine. "She was a saint, I

tell you—a saint! I met her just before the war, when I was living with my sister in her house in London. She used to come in by the day to do sewing and mending and wash my sister's linen and lace and fine underclothes. . . ."

The sluice-gates were opened and speech poured forth! You could see relief coming to the man as he talked—probably as he had never talked before—and I listened, knowing that with confession was coming healing, and that a new life was opening out before him even as he spoke.

It was an interesting and tragic story. Married as a young soldier to a pretty, greedy, heartless little woman, the marriage had not been a success. Mrs. Milward was a wanton to her backbone, with a passion for men, clothes, flattery and parties, and a hatred for all things domestic, including children—she steadfastly refused to have a baby, greatly to her husband's grief, as he adored children. She made herself notorious in India by flirting recklessly with every man that came her way, and I gathered that at last, hopeless of any happiness in his private life, young Captain Milward grimly accepted his fate, and for years sought solace and interest in his career alone, leaving his wife to go her own way as she chose. Then disaster befell Mrs. Milward—a severe accident while riding with the latest of her many swains, but alas, it did not result in freedom for her unfortunate spouse! Her brain was injured, and though she ultimately made a physical recovery, she had to be transferred back to England, to an expensive Private Home for mental cases, while her unfortunate husband returned to his soldiering and tried to bury his life's tragedy in sheer hard work.

During the ensuing years, Mrs. Drury, already widowed and without a family, undoubtedly did much for her forlorn brother, writing to him by every mail, sending him books, gramophone records and endless other oddments, and when he came back to England on his periodic leaves, exerting herself to look after him and give him the best time she possibly could. A wealthy woman, she could afford to come out to India when she liked, and so paid various visits to her brother, and while she was in her London home in Rutland Gate, on several occasions she gave hospitality to her sister-in-law, who, after the fashion of "variable" mental cases, now and then was reported sufficiently recovered to be allowed to return "home", so to speak, though always with an attendant discreetly disguised as a maid in her train.

These visits Mrs. Drury frankly dreaded—not from the obvious aspect, as she was a courageous woman enough, but because they meant enduring constant and trying embarrassments! Mrs. Milward would either conclude that Rutland Gate was her own house, and proceed to order the servants about, rearrange the furniture, issue invitations as from herself and so on, and when told firmly but kindly that she was not in her own home, would become hysterically indignant and demand to be taken there forthwith—further, why was her husband not there to meet her? When told that he was in India, she would recall her old life there, with its rounds of parties, its fun and flirtations, and give orders that places be booked for her and her “maid” in the next outgoing P. & O.—though any such idea was, of course, out of the question, Colonel Milward’s sister was often hard put to it to find reasons against the move that she could put into tactful words! But two or three years later Mrs. Milward’s mentality had so far degenerated that—considerably to Mrs. Drury’s relief!—Rutland Gate saw Nicholas Milward’s wife no more, and the Colonel’s sister could devote herself with renewed ardour towards cheering and lightening the monotony of her brother’s life in India.

She had a sincere love for her brother, had Rachel Drury—which should be remembered in her favour a little later on in this story. And knowing and appreciating that love and all she had tried to do for him to brighten his sadly stricken life, it was natural enough that when at last ill-health forced him to retire from active Army life Colonel Milward consented to go and live with his sister in her pleasant house in Rutland Gate.

Never having had any real private life of his own, he soon became accustomed and in a measure content to follow his sister’s energetic lead, escorting her to dinners, concerts and so on, playing the part of host when she entertained, taking a hand at bridge, golf or conversation as and when he was required, with only an occasional visit to the Club and a gossip with a military crony to flavour the monotony. . . . But he had barely grown accustomed to civilian life when the war of 1939 broke out, and within a few weeks all was drastically changed.

Most of Mrs. Drury’s staff of eight maids were swept off at once into the Services, into munitions or war work of some sort, and their places were taken by a miscellaneous succession of strange women—chief among them being a shy young Frenchwoman called Marie-Louise Poulain. Although Marie-Louise Poulain

had originally been engaged to come in two days a week to do fine mending, washing and so on, Mrs. Drury, finding herself in domestic difficulties, besought the girl to come to her permanently as maid and all-round "help"—a suggestion accompanied by the offer of a very handsome salary, so handsome that though the girl had never yet accepted a "living-in" job, preferring to be independent, she could not afford to refuse this, and so things were settled.

Belonging, as she did, to the type of woman who is never so happy as when she is running something or someone, for the first year of war Mrs. Drury thoroughly enjoyed herself sitting on Committees, organizing Charity Shows, Relief Schemes, Clubs, Canteens and so on for the troops—whom, after the fashion of her type, she called her Dear Boys—while things at the house in Rutland Gate, though with the larger rooms shut up, nevertheless continued to function fairly smoothly, thanks to the presence of Marie-Louise Poulain, Mrs. McNeish, the stout old Scottish cook who had been with Mrs. Drury for twenty-odd years, and a lame boot-boy, now turned man-of-all-work.

Those days Colonel Milward saw very little of his sister, between his duties at the War Office and her thousand-and-one interests and occupations connected with the Dear Boys, and the lonely soldier found himself discovering a curious sense of peace and content on coming home to a snug little meal served by a gentle, dark-eyed young woman who smiled diffidently on him, relieved him of his coat and cap, speedily learnt how to mix his whisky and soda precisely as he liked it, and altogether provided the cosy "home" atmosphere he had always secretly hungered for but never known.

A kindly, friendly soul himself, and a sincere lover of France, he felt sorry for the girl, so obviously alone in the world. He had caught occasional glimpses of her, slipping Little-Dorrit-like in and out of the house on her bi-weekly visits; he liked her slim, refined looks, and now that chance threw them into daily contact he welcomed the opportunity of learning something more about her. He spoke excellent French, having been, as a young soldier, liaison officer in Calais for a large part of the war of 1914-18, and fell into the habit of chatting to the girl as she served him—and in time he slowly began to piece together the shape and colour of her background.

Born at Havre of respectable bourgeois parents, she had become in her early teens a chambermaid in one of the larger hotels;

and after a time, being offered the chance of coming to England as personal maid to an Englishwoman staying in the hotel where she was working, had accepted it thankfully as, her own mother having recently died, her father had married a young woman and she was no longer happy at home.

She had spent several contented years with her English mistress, and when the latter unfortunately died, Marie-Louise decided to remain in England, where she had made friends and been happy; and until accepting the position of a resident maid at Rutland Gate, had supported herself by going out daily to work in various houses from the little room she rented with some Italian friends in Soho. She had never thought of marriage, having (as she shyly told the Colonel one night as she served his modest meal) no *dot* to tempt a Frenchman, and not sufficient beauty to attract a husband without it . . . eyeing the small pale face with the liquid dark eyes and smoothly-dressed dark hair, and the soft mouth with its pathetic droop, the Colonel gave a non-committal grunt as he turned to his evening paper. Not beautiful, my foot! She was a damn sight better-looking—far more of a lady—than the hard-voiced, painted-up wenches most chaps married these days. Pity . . . a damn nice girl! Just the sort of girl to make a first-class wife.

But it was not until the fall of France that the worthy Colonel realized just where his growing interest in his sister's maid was leading him! He arrived home to find Marie-Louise in his study, crouched beside the wireless, sobbing distractedly, her dark head laid along her arms . . . and something snapped in the soldier's breast, the iron band that, as in the old fairy story, had bound his heart for so many years, broke asunder, and he swept the girl into his arms and there stayed her heartbroken weeping in the best and oldest way in the world.

Lucky it was that Mrs. Drury was away for the week-end, for the lovers sat hand in hand beside the fire late into the night, talking earnestly, anxiously, about the future. Like the gentleman he was, the Colonel immediately told his love about his wife's existence—though in point of fact Marie-Louise already knew of the existence of the "mad Mrs. Milward". Lurid were the stories told by the cook, Mrs. McNeish, who had been in Mrs. Drury's service so long, of some of the unfortunate lady's visits to her sister-in-law. . . .

"I'd have married her the next day by special licence had it only been possible—if I'd been free!" the man said bluntly,

staring down at the battered, grubby little card. "I *knew*, you see, that I'd met the one woman for me—damned whether she was a peasant, where she came from, or who her parents were! I couldn't have cared less. D'you know what I mean?"

I nodded. I knew indeed what he meant. The instant recognition, the spark that lights a single soaring flame between two souls—the instant coming-together that cannot be gainsaid by trivialities such as class, creed, or even colour! The meeting of the Other Half. . . . Milward went on to tell, simply and briefly, how his love-story had followed its inevitable course. He was full of scruples, hesitations, doubts at first—but simply, frankly, and with the courage typical of a true woman, Marie-Louise Poulain took him to her arms, and for months the two lived in a daze of happiness, only shadowed by the fear of discovery by Mrs. Drury. . . . I put a question and the soldier coloured, but answered frankly.

"I've never known, to be honest. I . . . don't know if I want to know. If . . . if Rachel had a hand in subsequent developments . . . and I've no proof that she *had* . . . I'd never speak to her again, and I would hate that to happen! After all, she's my only sister, she's been devoted to me since we were kids together, she was awfully good to me when my marriage went west, and if she's 'managed' me since—well, most men are managed by a woman." He stared at the fire. "I . . . no, I don't know. Certainly, I'm sure at first she didn't suspect anything, though when later Marie-Louise gave in her notice she made no sort of attempt to stop her, though even I could see that the girl was invaluable to her. She just said something cryptic—or so Marie told me—about 'thinking it was the best thing all round', and that she'd 'been going to make a change anyway'. Maybe old McNeish had got suspicious and started hinting—I wouldn't know. But anyway, till then everything had been O.K. We had lots of time to ourselves. Rachel was up to the neck in all sorts of Committees and things, and out a great deal, and busy when she was in with meetings, and Lady This and Viscountess That, and having M.P.s, Cabinet Ministers and all sorts of big bugs to dinner. . . . I used to get out of those dinners as often as I could. I couldn't bear having to sit and see my girl waiting on those pompous old fools or on wasp-tongued, mean-minded women who weren't fit to tie her shoe-laces. Not that she minded—I never really knew the meaning of the 'dignity of labour' before. She used to go through it all with her own serene

poise, deft and quiet. She used to say there was nothing to be ashamed of in honest work—but how I used to writhe when I heard the women congratulate my sister on her ‘treasure of a maid’ and wish they could get another like her! And afterwards, when we were together in my sitting-room—it was on the third floor and Rachel had a groggy knee and couldn’t manage the stairs, so we were safe there—I used to rage and curse and beg her to leave, and let me find a corner for her where I could have her all to myself, but she used to laugh gently and pat my cheek and assure me that she did not mind. She had always had to earn her living and wished to go on doing so—she steadfastly refused to let me get a flat for her, saying that she would be, in that case, a ‘kept woman’ and for all her love for me she would not be that. She was too independent! But the time came when she had to change her mind. . . .”

He shook his greying head and sighed bitterly before he went on to tell me how when she found she was to have a baby she was frightened at first, but then grew proud and happy and declared that she did not mind if they were married or no, she was eager to be the mother of his child! Then, knowing that within a few months she would be unable to continue at her work at Rutland Gate, she gave in her notice and consented to his plan of taking a tiny flat for her where she could await the coming of their child. Sensitive to a degree, she refused to go back to Soho, where she had her few friends, saying that though she felt no shame of her condition, still she could not bear it to be discussed by outsiders, who would put the lowest and crudest interpretation on their association—so she begged him to choose a district where she would be completely unknown and could assume a married name. Ultimately he took a tiny flat in Maida Vale, and there the child was born and christened “Nicolette” after her father Nicholas, and for almost two years the little idyll continued and the middle-aged soldier and his shy French love both knew a bliss they had never dreamed existed. But it was too good to last. As so often seems to happen, the gods, jealous perhaps of mere mortals attaining supreme happiness, decided to take a hand in the game, and suddenly, shattering disaster, like a tidal wave, overtook the lovers!

A skidding taxi colliding with a bus refuge on which the Colonel was standing swept him into the road with it, and he was carried to Rutland Gate unconscious, with a leg broken in two places, a couple of fractured ribs and slight concussion.

For several days he lay muttering and tossing on his bed with a raging temperature, during which time it is more than likely that he let slip, to the amazed and infuriated ears of his sister, who was nursing him, quite enough about Marie-Louise, the baby and their little secret home for her to realize the situation—or to confirm her previous suspicions, which, we shall never know—and to act upon it with her usual promptitude. For I fear the blame for the tragic sequel must be laid upon Mrs. Drury's shoulders. . . .

The moment he recovered sufficiently to realize what had happened, the unfortunate man went nearly demented with anxiety, wondering how on earth he was to get word to his love of what had happened—reassure her, warn her not to write lest her letters fall into Mrs. Drury's hands. He dared not telephone her, though tantalizingly, the instrument stood at his elbow by the bed—but there was an extension-line both to Mrs. Drury's room and to the kitchen, and his conversation might have been "tapped" by either Mrs. Drury or Mrs. McNeish. At last he managed to scribble a few words, put them in an envelope and bribed the boot-boy to put it in the post for him—but whether the letter ever reached its destination in Maida Vale he never knew. I am inclined to think it did not. If Mrs. Drury was already on the *qui vive*, his unusual request to have the boot-boy sent up to his room to take a letter, instead of sending it down in the usual way to the "to be posted" box in the hall would undoubtedly have aroused her suspicions! She would have impounded the letter on the pretext of posting it herself—and read it!

Similarly, I feel fairly certain that any letter sent on to him from the Club (where Marie-Louise, when she needed to write, sent her letters for safety's sake) must have fallen into Mrs. Drury's hands. Some such letter or letters must certainly have been sent to the Club by Marie-Louise during the days that followed her lover's accident, when he lay delirious and unconscious of all that was going on around him, and she heard no word or sign . . . but only one thing definitely emerges.

When at last the Colonel managed to drag himself out to the red telephone box at the corner of Rutland Gate, and put a call through to Maida Vale, it was unanswered—and frantic enquiries resulted in the crisp information that "that subscriber was no longer working on the line". Weak as he was, he flung himself forthwith into a taxi and rushed off to the flat—to find it empty! Marie-Louise had departed with her child—and left no address.

Enquiries of the porter of the flats brought little information beyond this, that she had packed up her things and those of the baby one day, called a taxi and simply gone away into the blue, leaving no address, but a blunt message for the Colonel "in case he called" to the effect that she had "decided it was better to go". The blow was so severe that the unfortunate man collapsed on the spot, was taken back to Rutland Gate in a high fever, and for weeks afterwards his life was despaired of . . . and when ultimately he recovered, though he searched frantically high and low for his love, he failed to find her, and at last sank into a despairing apathy, in which, deciding that life was ended for him, and all that was left was to drag through it as best he could, he assented listlessly to his sister's suggestion to leave London for Drury Place, her country house at Abbots' Holme. And until the advent of the strange baby stirred something deep down within him to life again, he had drifted through the days a man to all intents and purposes—dead. Life no longer held any meaning for him . . . and the news, a few short weeks later, of his wife's death merely served to emphasize his despair.

He had done all he could to trace the woman and child who had made Heaven on earth for him for two short years—but he had failed. When he grew strong enough to crawl about London he had visited all the haunts she had told him of in Soho, looked up her few friends, especially the kindly Italian couple, a wine-dealer and his wife, with whom she used to rent a room, but gathered nothing except curious and half-suspicious looks and guarded answers . . . it was evident that she had not returned to Soho. And where, on leaving Maida Vale with her child, she had hidden herself, and worked until, bombed-out, she went, with a crowd of other unfortunates, to take refuge in Camden Town a short month before the disaster that overtook them all—this would never be known. Why—why had she taken that harsh and bitter decision to break away from the man she adored, the father of her child? Yet in the back of my mind I knew the answer to this. I could see, thrown against the mental screen of my mind, almost as a film is thrown against the screen in a cinema, the picture, small as a vignette yet distinct, of a small sitting-room wherein two women faced each other!

One, a quiet dark-eyed girl, her face white and strained, standing beside a crib in which a child lay sleeping, and the other a plump, smartly-dressed elderly woman whose face, normally pleasant and kindly enough, was set in an expression of furious

resentment. Without "hearing" actual words, yet I knew what was being said—how dared she, a mere maidservant, entangle a man in the Colonel's position? It was disgusting, outrageous! Worse, it was going to ruin his position and reputation in society, in his Clubs, amongst his fellow-officers, as the world and the War Office did not look at all kindly upon officers who kept maidservants in back-street flats and had children by them . . . did she want to ruin his life? He would be cut by all his friends, nobody would speak to him, and it was hopeless imagining that he might ever marry her—he was married already. Did she happen to know that? And then in answer to the proud and instant retort, "Of course I knew! From the very first!" a pause, and then a shaft that penetrated right between the joints of the armour and inflicted a mortal blow.

Well, perhaps she didn't know *this* then—that Mrs. Milward had been passed as completely cured and was returning to her husband very soon? Stunned and bewildered, the poor girl tried hard to parry the blow, but her opponent followed it up swiftly. Hadn't she wondered why she had heard nothing from him for so long—a week now, wasn't it? Ah . . . he had not dared to face her, Marie-Louise, with the truth! And then came the trump-card, the production of a letter to herself—its date, of many years earlier, conveniently blotted out—from the doctor who had been Head of the Mental Home in which Doris Milward had been incarcerated for so many years. A letter to the effect that "such great improvement had shown itself in Mrs. Milward's mental condition that he had no hesitation in giving his permission for her to leave the Home".

How heartily Mrs. Drury, when planning this coup, must have congratulated herself on having kept all the letters and papers relating to her unfortunate sister-in-law . . . that letter, indeed, was the fatal blow. I saw the colour drain from the girl's face, her hand close tightly upon the rail of her baby's cot, and she nodded as she handed back the letter. Poor child! How could she guess that it was simply an old letter intimating that young Mrs. Milward was normal enough to pay her sister-in-law one of her periodic visits?

"I understand, madame," she said, and her tone was as colourless as her face. "I will go. Your brother will never hear of me again." And the picture faded from my mental vision as I heard the Colonel speak.

"So . . . that's my story, Pennoyer. And it's been a great

relief to get it off my chest. God be praised, I've something to live for and my path ahead is plain—thanks to *you*! I've found my child, and I shall devote my life to her. I suppose I had better adopt her—if it can be arranged. . . .”

“I'm sure it can be arranged,” I said sincerely. “This meeting between you is no accident, you know—it never is. I'm sure Marie-Louise has had a hand in bringing it about—and that she'll be close to you and the child from now right on.”

He rose from his chair and paced the room, his eyes bright, his cheeks glowing as he talked—it was good to see life, vigour, enterprise, alight once more in that lean, weather-beaten face.

“I shall take a smallish house somewhere near here . . . get a man and wife to run it, and a nurse for Colette.” He spoke the word proudly. “My name is Nicholas—did you know? That's why we called the baby ‘Nicolette’ . . . I don't know what my sister will say, but I'm damned if I care! I shall show her this card and tell her the truth and ask if . . .”

“I shouldn't,” I said hastily. “Honestly, Milward, I shouldn't. Even if Mrs. Drury *has* had some sort of a finger in this tragic pie, doubtless she did it—or thought she did it—for your sake, and for what she thought was best for you. Women are kittle cattle, and she adores you and is really a kindly woman, if she *is*—forgive me—rather a meddler! What's past is past and over, and whatever she might have done on a moment's angry impulse, I'm sure she is sorry for now. Also, for Colette's sake, ‘least said is soonest mended’—and you don't want an angry, antagonistic sister letting slip the truth that she's illegitimate to some of her long-tongued friends! What *you* may decide to tell the child later when she grows up is quite another thing—and your business only. If I might suggest it, I would simply give out that you have decided to adopt this child, as you've taken a liking to it, and leave it at that. It's quite enough for the world to know. . . .”

“I think you're right,” said the Colonel with an air of relief. “And now . . .”

There was a movement outside the window, and we both turned sharply. A dumpy little figure was toddling across the threshold of the open window from the lawn, a figure with a round, mischievous small face and two ridiculous plaits sticking up each side, each tied with a wisp of pink ribbon, and on her heels came a slim young figure in yellow—Nurse Jenks, as usual, in pursuit of the most obstreperous baby in the Home! She made a dive

for the child and, picking it up, stood facing us, or rather the Colonel—I doubt if she even noted I was there. I saw that her bright eyes were full of tears and her soft mouth quivering, and knew at once that she had overheard most of the pathetic story of Little Pickles' mother. . . .

"Oh," she said, and her voice trembled. "She shouldn't—I shouldn't have come! But she wouldn't stay with me. She knew you were there, and she had to come to her . . . her father!" She held the child out—there was a dramatic pause and with one stride the Colonel swept girl and child into his arms and held them close. And with, I admit, a lump in my throat that felt the size of a tennis-ball, I went in search of Jane, and we fell on each other's necks and fairly carolled with joy!

Oh yes, it all fell out as I'd predicted. Mrs. Drury, when she learned of her brother's amazing decision, was at first so completely stunned that she simply did not know what to say—and by the time she had pulled herself sufficiently together to formulate any plans to counter his, matters were so far advanced that protest was hopeless and she was forced to accept the situation! How much or how little her brother ultimately told her of the truth and his suspicions of her part in it all, I never knew—I imagine a certain amount, from her unusually subdued air at the wedding. Wedding? Oh yes! The Colonel not only adopted little Colette, but married Nurse Jenks almost, one might say, off-hand, so that before the village had time to get over one shock it had to face another! These slow, apparently rather bovine men can show a surprising turn of speed and decision when they like. . . .

Naturally the County, who had considered Colonel Milward a very desirable *parti* and had been angling for him for months, were rather nose-in-the-air when he married the youngest Sister in the Home, and predicted that the marriage would never last, owing to the discrepancy of years between the two. But their gloomy prophecies were thoroughly confounded, as such prophecies frequently are! The two are as happy as they can possibly be, with a pair of bouncing babies of their own, and Colette, now growing into a slim, dark little girl—exactly like her French mother, I should imagine—proudly occupying the position of the eldest. Young Mrs. Milward's affection for her twin sons has not made the slightest difference to her love for "Little Pickles", who joins with her in petting the "three men" of the

house, her tall father and the two baby boys. They live at Drury Place. When she heard of her brother's decision to marry and settle down in Abbots' Holme, Mrs. Drury decided to let him take over her house—she would return to Rutland Gate and her friends in London. On the whole, she declared, she vastly preferred town. And now the War was over and one could live in reasonable comfort and safety again. . . .

So now the green door between the two properties is unlocked once more, as Colonel Milward is Secretary of the "Abbots' Holme Foundation", and Jane's right-hand man in any and every extension and improvement she tries to make in her beloved Home; and the annual party at Drury Place is gayer and merrier than ever, presided over by those three child-lovers, Colonel Milward, his bright young wife, and my stalwart cousin Jane Ormond. Truly, from wherever she is, Marie-Louise Poulain must smile with joy to see the happiness and content that now surrounds her two dear ones. Yes, I know what's on the tip of your tongue! A very natural question, and one that most people would ask—though since you've been working with me for some years, Jerry, you *ought* to be able to answer it yourself.

No, of course little Peggy Jenks could never—and to do her credit, never expected—to take the place that Marie-Louise had held in her lover's heart. But fortunately for poor humanity, there are happy marriages, marriages of great affection, of understanding, sympathy, companionship, contracted every day on this poor world of ours—marriages that are infinitely worthwhile, even if they are not marriages of Affinities, that perfect link that is the mating of two Twin Souls. That marriage that is lit by the white flame of the love that links two that were One in the very Beginning and will ultimately be One again when they have finished their wanderings. . . .

From her place on the Other Side Marie-Louise, watching with sorrowful eyes the sadness and loneliness of her Beloved, the forlorn future of her child, planned and worked to bring them together—and used as part of her plan the kind and loving personality of little Peggy Jenks. In her wisdom she recognized in her a soul brimful of love, and eager to give it, full measure, pressed down and running over, to whosoever might truly need it. A young soul truly, but a soul who would serve and help, eagerly, ardently, for the sheer sake of serving . . . a soul who already loved the child, and who from pity and sympathy was more than ready to love the man. So thankfully the older

woman, helped by the Masters on the Other Side, brought the three together, knowing that the bringing would be for the happiness of all three, for their enrichment in knowledge and experience. Knowing that when they all met on the Other Side, when this brief day of Life was over, that there she would welcome her two Beloveds once more, and bless the girl who had served them, and in so doing, added greatly to her own spiritual development.

So that is the end—but for one curious thing I noted that I forgot to tell you. When I went up to bed the night following on my exciting interview with the Colonel, I opened the envelope that contained the enplaited hairs—just to see whether anything had happened to them. I was conscious, as soon as I returned to Abbots' Holme with my evidence, the coloured card, that the curious sensation of "heat" over my heart had completely vanished . . . and now, as I carefully undid the flap and peered inside, I saw that the flat little pad of entwined hair had vanished also. All that was left in the envelope was a tiny spoonful of powdery dust. . . .

I tilted it out upon the palm of my hand and blew it away . . . and I thanked the Powers that allow me to work for Them, that They had given me, yet again, an unforgettable experience.

THE CASE OF THE MOONCHILD

I WAS EATING MY BREAKFAST one sunny morning in June in my rooms in Ebury Street, when the telephone rang and Pennoyer's voice came through—a long-distance call from Devonshire. I was surprised, as he had gone down to that delectable county on a visit to the house of a friend unknown to me—man called Randolph Hastie—for a holiday, and I was not expecting to hear from him until his return, which was not due for a fortnight. But from his opening words I knew at once that if he had gone down for a holiday, he was not going to get one . . . there was work afoot, and I was wanted.

He was, as always, crisp and to the point.

"Jerry, can you arrange to come down here to me as soon as possible—and bring the bogey-bag?"

This was a bag that Pennoyer kept ready packed for emergencies—*not*, however, containing pyjamas and shaving-tackle and the other thousand and one necessities of travel, but filled with all sorts of oils and unguents, queer-looking metal contraptions, robes and headgear, various documents and a book or two, packets of herbs, odd-looking amulets, all manner of things that might be needed by my colleague in his frequent battles with the Forces of the Outer Dark . . . hence my nickname the "bogey-bag" for the bulky black leather portmanteau that as a rule accompanied my friend on all his travellings.

"Of course," I said. "I've nothing very pressing except to correct the galley-proofs of my new novel, and I can bring those down and do them as and when I find the time. Do you want me to try and come to-day? If I make a dash for it I think I can catch an afternoon train from Paddington. What's up?"

"Nothing—yet," said my friend. "And anyway, you aren't supposed to be coming down for anything but a holiday, see? The success of your last novel gave me the chance I wanted to bring you down here—I find my host's wife is an ardent fan of yours! So I mentioned your name and said how run down you were, and how much I wished you could come here for a rest, and at once she was all agog to try and get you down . . . which was precisely what I'd been angling for, of course! I'll tell you the rest when I see you—I'll meet you at the station. If you catch

the train you're speaking of you should get to Exeter about five-thirty and change there for Pendean, where I'll pick you up. So-long! I'll see you about seven-thirty, and we'll get to Hastie's in time for dinner at eight."

But the gods decreed otherwise.

Though I caught the afternoon train quite easily, and had a reasonably comfortable journey down to Exeter, the train was held up twice *en route* for some maddening reason or other, with the result that when I arrived at Exeter I had missed my Pendean connection and had to wait for another train that wasn't due at Pendean Station until about nine-thirty; and as I sat in it I wondered gloomily whether Pen would have given me up for lost and gone—which would mean either spending the night in the waiting-room at the station or else setting out for a long tramp to find Hastie's house! But when at last, cross, hungry and tired, clutching the "bogey-bag" in one hand and my suitcase in the other, I stumbled out upon Pendean platform, I saw Pennoyer waiting, and my spirits lightened. He had guessed (he explained) when I failed to appear on the earlier train, what had happened, gone back to dinner and returned afterwards to meet the second train; and as he ushered me out of the station and into a comfortable car driven by a stockily-built, middle-aged man, whose lack of uniform spelt "handyman" rather than chauffeur, my weariness began to disappear. I settled back into the cushions, lighted a cigarette, and began the inevitable string of questions. But Pennoyer shook his head.

"Sorry, Jerry," he said, "but at the moment I've really very little to tell you about this case." He frowned. "All I know is, I 'smell' something wrong—something definitely psychically wrong! Though I know it sounds absurd—can you imagine psychic evil in *this* sort of setting?"

He waved an eloquent hand towards the scene outside the car windows. We were gliding down a typical Devonshire lane, deep-sunk between hedges of dogrose and honeysuckle, the scene of which lay heavy on the warm evening air. It was a gorgeous June night, and the sky above arched deep blue and clear as a bell-glass, pricked here and there with faint crystal stars, and through gaps in the hedge I could see streaks of fiery rose and orange and gold as the sun sank to rest. . . .

"I know what you mean," I said. "But what . . ."

"I can't tell you anything more definite, it's all too intangible," said my friend with a trace of impatience. "But I'll tell you

these points just to put you wise to the family and the situation in general. Thank goodness there's a screen between ourselves and good old Fred Higgs so that we can talk freely!"

Briefly put, this is what he told me. He had known this Randolph Hastie for years—mainly through his first wife, one Miriam Lysaght. She had been a woman of great psychic gifts who had studied with Pennoyer for some time, and if she had not met and married Hastie would, Pennoyer said, have made one of the finest mediums in England. Through her, Hastie and Pennoyer met and became friends, and Pennoyer tried hard to persuade Hastie to allow Miriam to go on with her work. But Hastie—though by no means entirely disbelieving in or antagonistic to psychic matters—was rather shy and wary of them, and certainly hated the idea of his future wife's becoming a medium. So another valuable worker in the psychic field was lost, and Miriam Hastie, like many other women before her, stifled her gifts for the sake of love. She bore her husband two children, a boy who died soon after birth, and a girl born in June, the Moon month, whom she insisted on calling "Mona", and to whom Pennoyer stood godfather. But, alas! a few years after the birth of the little girl, Miriam Hastie died and left her forlorn husband to look after her child and to live as best he could in the memory of a marriage as well-nigh perfect as can be known in this imperfect world. But Randolph Hastie, deeply as he had loved his wife, was not built to live alone, and after a few years he married again. Pennoyer paused, and I glanced at him curiously.

"How's it working out?" I asked.

Pennoyer shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Why," he said, "I think in a sense he's happy. His second wife was a friend of Miriam's, and she's genuinely fond of him and means to do her best for the child Mona—who's fifteen this birthday, on the 28th June. Mark that date, will you? It's just a week ahead. They all get on quite happily together. But now and then I imagine it must feel to Randolph, who's no fool, like living with a poor imitation instead of the real thing! Kitty Hastie's kind and well-meaning enough as far as she goes, but she hasn't a rag of real brains, whereas Miriam was deeply intelligent. She gives the impression of beauty—but Miriam was really beautiful. She apes Miriam's interest in psychic matters . . . which despite his fear of them, Randolph also shared to a great extent . . . but she has no real psychic understanding. And she is fatally easily influenced. . . ."

"Who's trying to influence her?" I demanded, and Pennoyer smiled.

"That," he said, "you will very soon see—and that's the core of this problem! Here we are—here's 'The Haven'."

It was too dark to see details as we turned in, between two dumpy white posts, to a short gravel drive, but I could see high-rearing trees outlined against the purple sky and smell the mingled scents of a garden as we swept up to a pretty little pillared portico set in a square white house. From the amber-lighted oblong in the middle that was the open front door, a neatly-capped-and-aproned maid came forward to meet us, but as we climbed out of the car a quick step came round the corner of the house, crunched on the gravel and Randolph Hastie, large and genial, loomed over us.

"Here you are—so glad to see you!" His voice was deep and pleasant and the grip of his hand friendly. "My dear Latimer, I'm *so* sorry about your missing that damned train—bad luck! You must be famished. . . . Let Heppy take your bags upstairs and come right round to the lawn, it's on the other side of the house. It's such a lovely night that we're all sitting out. I've got some sandwiches and salad and fruit for you, and you could do with a drink, couldn't you?"

Nothing loath, I left the bags in "Heppy's" care and followed Hastie's lead round the corner of the house to the back, where, on a smooth lawn before the wideset windows of what was evidently the drawing-room, a group of four people were sitting, three of whom rose with exclamations of welcome to greet us.

My hostess was a woman of about forty-two or three—tall, thin, rather vague and untidy, the drooping, drifting type, if you know what I mean. Quite attractive—if you like that type. She had large brown eyes that she knew how to use, brown hair worn in a state of "admir'd disorder", and rather "arty" clothes—in this case a floating, clinging sort of frock in blue with a rope of green glass beads as big as marbles, and about two dozen coloured glass bangles that jangled incessantly—also a rather gushing manner and a lisp that to some men would be, I could see, attractive and to others intensely irritating! On the whole, though, a likeable creature enough. A kindly, rather silly woman who never meant anybody any harm but whose very silliness might easily lead her into serious danger.

She twittered the usual charming nothings and lamped her great eyes at me as I shook hands, first with her and then with

the second woman, a Miss Webb, a dumpy, middle-aged woman in grey, a governess or companion of sorts, I judged her—and then Hastie brought forward, with a tender hand on her shoulder, a girl of fourteen—his only daughter Mona.

If I had guessed—as I did not, of course—that the whole of the amazing experience that was to follow my arrival at “The Haven”, Hastie’s house, was to centre about Mona Hastie, I would have taken more notice of her on that initial meeting. But as it was, I merely noted that she seemed a tall, well-grown girl for her age—rather on the plump side in fact, which made her look older than her years. That she had long brown hair that hung down her back—in itself rather unusual in the present-day craze for short hair for women—and that she had on a white frock that struck me as overlong both for the current fashion and for her age, and that was all. For the moment I confusedly thought that a fourth and older woman—a white figure seated in a deep wicker chair at the far side of the little group—awaited my salutations, but to my surprise, as I shook hands with Mona Hastie, Mrs. Hastie laid her long hand on my arm and gushed at me. . . .

“And *now* you must meet Farver Aloysius!”

From the depths of the wicker chair the figure bowed to me, and I confess I blinked, for I was suddenly confronted with a picture right out of some old Italian religious painting! A priest! Tonsured and sandalled, wearing a plain white serge cassock belted with a purple sash and adorned with a tremendous jewelled cross swinging from a long embossed silver chain, the occupant of the chair was certainly a surprising figure to meet in a quiet Devonshire garden at ten o’clock at night, and I could see, from the sardonically-amused gleam in his deep-set eyes as he looked up at me, that my astonishment had been noted and enjoyed! I murmured polite greetings and was, to tell the truth, rather relieved to feel Hastie’s hand under my elbow urging me towards a small table behind the group of chairs, where, set out temptingly in the light thrown out from the drawing-room behind, was a tall decanter of whisky and a siphon, and flanking them a silver dish piled with sandwiches, another with salad and yet a third with fruit.

I fell to at once with frankly greedy appreciation as Hastie, tactfully leaving me in peace to satisfy my hunger, as all good hosts should do, rejoined the group about Father Aloysius, beside whom Pennoyer had already seated himself, apparently to resume

a discussion commenced earlier in the evening. I listened with interest to the talk as I munched. . . .

I must admit that I was impressed with what I could hear of Father Aloysius! He was arguing some abstruse point of philosophy with Pennoyer, and I had rarely known my friend find an opponent so worthy of his steel. It was plain to anyone at all psychically perceptive that they were mentally "fencing" under the smokescreen of the talk—each trying to find out something about the other, testing, probing, trying the defences as it were, but I had no doubt that Pennoyer's defences were a match for the stranger, however powerful he might be—and after a while both laughed, shrugged and abandoned the point. Pennoyer turned to Hastie, the other man to the women—and here it was plain he had an audience ready to his hand. They listened admiringly, adoringly, the older women seated each side of him, and Mona on a footstool at his feet, one arm resting on his knee, her eyes fixed on his face. Now and then, when making a point, he laid a hand on her arm—the gesture was faintly possessive, and when this happened Hastie shifted now and then in his chair and faltered in his talk to Pennoyer. I realized that the big man was—no, not jealous, that is too strong, nor is "resentful" either quite the word—"uneasy" is more the expression that came into my mind as I watched him.

There was something queer here—I sensed an undercurrent of tension in the atmosphere, a note out of tune. While I would never, of course, develop the "nose" of Miles Pennoyer for sniffing out psychic ills, still, constant work and contact with him had sharpened my perceptions very much beyond those of the ordinary man, and I realized that Pennoyer had been right as always, in telling me to bring the bogey-bag. We might need it. . . .

Furtively, as I ate, I studied the face of the man in the white cassock. The light from the drawing-room fell full upon him and the little group of women about him—he looked like a father preaching to his children, and I have no doubt that was the picture he intended to create! My critical British mind, regarding his robes, his jewels, his tonsure, all the rest, sniffed "theatrical!"—but the criticism was true only in a sense, as it was plain from his conversation that the man was far from being merely a *poseur*. He was tall and bulkily built, and had a fine head of the Roman Emperor type; somewhat too fleshy, perhaps, about the jowl and throat, but with a profoundly intelligent brow, a prominent nose and jutting chin, and deep-set dark eyes under

heavy black brows. His tonsure was plainly artificial—I mean he was not naturally bald. The crown of his head was delicately shaven, and the ring of hair about his fine dome-like skull was thick and black, without a touch of grey. I would have judged him somewhere about forty-five at most, quite possibly two or three years less. He was smiling as he talked, and the smile was charming, yet all the time I seemed to sense that it was merely an “acted” smile, as it were, and that actually the man was very far from being a smiling, friendly sort of creature. I got an impression, as I watched that arrogantly-tilted chin, those roving, dominant eyes, of a personality formidably strong, of a mind imperious, ruthless, that would stride to its end over any and everything that might lie between it and its goal. . . .

I started, for the man suddenly looked over to me and smiled! Not the engaging smile he had been displaying for the beguilement of the women grouped about him, but a smile cool, derisive, insolent . . . he had plainly been aware of my intent study of him, and been amused at it. That was the second laugh he had got out of me that evening, and I felt myself flush with annoyance like a schoolboy caught using a crib. . . . He rose to his feet, holding out to Mrs. Hastie a hand bearing on the little finger an immense star-sapphire set in a rim of diamonds.

“It grows late—and our newly-arrived friend must be tired,” he said gracefully. “Moreover, I have a little way to walk back to my Sanctuary. No, no, dear lady—I do not need the car. It is a beautiful night, and I shall take the short cut, if I may, from your garden that runs through the woods. And as you know, I am not unprotected. Kraa!”

The last word was a sharp call, and I jumped as a figure arose from the bushes beyond the group of chairs—a lean, dark-skinned, bearded native in a long grey robe and twisted turban of varicoloured silks, grey and blue, silver and black and mauve. He had a formidable knife in a leather sheath thrust through his belt and carried a lighted lantern in one hand, and as he came noiselessly to his master’s side the two fantastic figures made a novel and startling picture. If to astonish and impress was the aim of Father Aloysius, I reflected sardonically, he had certainly succeeded—but to what end? I continued to watch him curiously as he bade his *adieux* to the ladies and myself, laid a hand caressingly on Mona’s shoulder with the words, “Till to-morrow, my child—sleep well!” and with Hastie at his side moved away across the lawn, followed by his silent servitor carry-

ing the lantern. As they disappeared into the dusk, the girl Mona, as though moved by a sudden impulse, ran after them, and Mrs. Hastie drew a long breath of admiration and turned to me.

"Isn't he marv'lous—no wonder ve child's devoted to him!" she breathed ecstatically. "Did you ever . . ."

"He's certainly a notable-looking man," I said cautiously, "and as far as I could gather from what I heard, a brilliant one too. But who—what *is* he, and why the cassock and the cross and ring and all the rest of it? Is he the Abbot of some local monastery?"

Mrs. Hastie and Miss Webb looked at me as though I had said something blasphemous.

"Oh *no*!" Mrs. Hastie's voice was hushed. "Nof'ing so . . . so *ordina'y*. He is Ve Head of 'Ve Sanctuary', a simply won'erful sort of school near here—Mona goes to it. She was ve'y lucky to get in—he only takes a few girls, vose he finks will do him and his t'aining c'edit."

My eyes frankly rounded. Father Aloysius a schoolmaster? Wonders would never cease!

"But why . . ." I began, and Mrs. Hastie laughed archly and shook a finger at me.

"Oh, I know vat you're going to say—you men are all alike!" she trilled. "'Why' vis and 'why' vat . . . I can't pretend to explain ve why and wherefore of all Farver Aloysius' ways, I'm not *half* clever enough, but I know he wears a cassock because he's an ordained Roman Catholic p'iest, vough he doesn't actually p'actise, so to speak. At least, I know he doesn't belong to any Order . . . he p'efers to be alone. He has chosen to form his own g'oup and t'ain vem according to his own feories. . . ."

Again I had that sense of something wrong. A priest who had broken away . . . formed his own cult . . . no, school . . . why did the word "cult" come into my mind? I saw that Pennoyer was watching me closely as he sat silent in his chair, the gleaming golden beads of his *kombologia* slipping one by one through his lean fingers.

"Very interesting! How many pupils has he?" I said non-committally. "How many assistants has he, and how long has he been doing this thing? To judge from his outfit and the *Arabian Nights* attendant, he must get pretty heavy fees!"

Miss Webb drew in her breath with a pained hiss, Mrs. Hastie looked reprovingly at me, and I realized I had made a *gaffe*.

Evidently Father Aloysius and all connected with him must be approached on bended knee! I glanced at Pennoyer for a lead. I had no desire to put these fawning women off at the start, I would get nothing that way . . . and yet I had thought the wisest rôle I could play would be that of plain John Blunt. . . .

Pennoyer came to my rescue.

"You must forgive my friend Latimer if he's a trifle down-right," he said, smiling, and I saw the faces of both ladies begin to thaw slightly. "And you will admit that Father Aloysius is a rather startling person to meet, and invites all sorts of questions and speculations! But Latimer is as interested as I am in the educational problem, and must feel that anybody who has the courage to—er—break away from tradition and try to hammer out some better way of educating young people than our present *most* unimaginative school-system, deserves the highest praise. Do tell me more about this school? You forget to-night is the first time I've met this man, and I am extremely impressed with him as a personality."

This I knew was true—though not quite in the sense in which the ladies took it!—and Mrs. Hastie was already opening her mouth on what I hoped would be a flood of confidential information when two shadowy figures loomed through the dusk, and Hastie, with his daughter hanging on his arm, came across the lawn towards us.

I noticed, as they came into the light that streamed from the drawing-room windows, that the girl's dress, which I had not really noticed until now, had something faintly archaic about it. It was a straight-hanging white robe which hung level with her ankles, with loose open sleeves, and pleated from neck to hem. She wore a white leather belt about her waist, with a sort of pouch attached, white leather sandals on bare feet, and with her long brown hair bound back from her face by a narrow white ribbon, she reminded me suddenly of a young priestess of some strange temple. . . .

"You're up later than you should be, Mona, for a young woman of only fourteen," observed Pennoyer, as they came up to us.

The child turned languid brown eyes on him and shook her head.

"I couldn't go to bed while the Master was here," she said reverently. "I simply *couldn't*!"

I looked at her with attention—the recent conversation had

aroused my interest. Hastie was looking down at her, his arm round her shoulders, and suddenly I realized how much she meant to him. Whatever he might feel for the charming, silly woman he had married *en seconde nocces*, this girl, the child of his first and deepest love, held pride of place in his heart. As she spoke he gave her shoulders a loving little squeeze.

"Well, it's bed for you now at all events," he said bluffly. "And for all of us too, I think! I know Pen never minds an early night, and you, poor chap, must be all in after your journey down. But before going up, do you both mind helping me get these chairs in? The girls will clear away the supper things—we don't keep Heppy up to do these things when we stay out late."

The "girls" bustled forward to deal with the remains of my excellent supper. Hastie and Pennoyer each took an end of the long wicker settee that was Mrs. Hastie's favourite seat, and as they carried it away in the direction of the little summer-house where such things were stored, I went to lift the chair in which Father Aloysius had sat. As I stooped to it I saw a gleam lying at my feet—something was lying on the smoothly-mown turf. I bent and picked it up . . . it was the jewelled cross and chain that had hung upon the breast of the strange priest.

I opened my mouth to shout out the news of my discovery to Hastie—but even as I opened it, some odd instinct nudged me and I closed my mouth again. No! For some reason I felt I had better not mention my find . . . not, at least, until Pennoyer had seen it. I slipped the jewel into my pocket, finished helping to put away the garden furniture, bade good night to my host and hostess and ascended the stairs with Pennoyer—who, fortunately for me, had the room next to mine. He afterwards told me that he had "impressed" Mrs. Hastie to make this arrangement, as it would have been very awkward, if we were working in concert, to have to trudge down corridors and up and down stairs to reach each other!

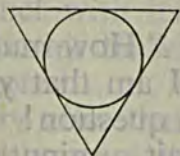
I sat down on the edge of his bed, and Pennoyer looked faintly surprised.

"My dear chap, aren't you sleepy?" he said. "I warn you I'm not going to spend half the night discussing this problem. It's not ready yet."

"I'm not thinking about that," I said, thrusting my hand into my pocket. "I wanted to show you this. I found it in the garden just now, and almost shouted to Hastie—and then I felt I'd better show it to you first."

Together we examined it in the bright light that hung over the dressing-table. It was a magnificent ornament—a cross, of Russian workmanship, I would have said, about six inches long by four across, made of huge square-cut amethysts of a purple dark as a black grape, with a line of brilliants running all round as a border, and four large sapphires set at the junction of the crossed bars. It was slung on a silver chain; rather an odd chain, made of small discs and squares of silver, alternating with each other and linked together with delicate silver links, and on each disc and square was engraved a small design.

Pennoyer reached for his reading-glass and pored over the chain for a long moment, then handed it to me without a word. I studied the designs in my turn and gave an exclamation of surprise. Each square showed an inverted triangle with a circle inside, so—



—and on each disc, of all things, was a conventional cat's head! A chain of cats' heads to support a cross. . . .

I ran the chain through my fingers, and coming to the cross, turned it over and started—for on the reverse side was a most amazing thing! The figure of a woman, naked as dawn, graven clearly on the silver, stood with her two arms flung out, forming the cross-bars of the cross, and behind her head two up-curving horns reached up to Heaven. Venus, naked, pagan, shameless, with the Crescent of the Moon balanced on her head. . . .

"Good Lord, Pen!" I said. "What sort of a priest wears *this* on the back of a cross?"

But Pennoyer's strange eyes were already focussed eagerly on the figure etched on the shining silver. He all but snatched it from my hand, and his voice was taut with excitement, almost triumph, as he spoke.

"What luck—what amazing, extraordinary luck to find this!" He examined the clasp. "Pretty strong! The White Brothers must have worked hard to throw this clue in our way. Now I can get a slant on our worthy Father Aloysius—and without his knowing it!" He glanced at me. "What do these things convey to you, Jerry? You've learnt sufficient now from me to know the meaning of symbols?"

I stared down at the cross and the chain with its curious string of alternating cats' heads and triangles.

"You were obviously right in feeling the fellow's after no good," I said. "Though just what all this amounts to I can't quite say as yet. I *do* know that an inverted Triangle implies evil, because the apex should always point to Heaven—same as the arms of the swastika should always point right, and if they point left it means evil instead of good. And obviously a naked woman—Venus—is the opposite of the Virgin—Purity. And the Moon on her head . . . wait, I'm getting it! The cult this chap belongs to, or runs, whichever it is . . . good Lord, I had the word 'cult' in my mind only ten minutes ago instead of school . . ."

I was so surprised I broke off, and Pennoyer laughed with satisfaction.

"Good man!" he said. "How much wiser you are than you realize, and how thankful I am that you've learnt to obey your inner hunches now without question! Go on!"

"The cat's head . . . wait a minute, the cat's a symbol of so many things." I frowned. "All these three must link up somehow . . . ah! Pasht—Bast—the Cat Goddess—cats mean the moon—there's the Crescent Moon on the woman's head—the Moon Goddess—and the Evil Triangle with the moon-disc inside it." I looked at my friend with a little pardonable triumph. "It's some sort of moon-worship, isn't it? And more black than white."

"Right all along," said Pennoyer. "There's only one thing you've forgotten—to count the discs and the squares. There are ten of each, my friend, and ten is the Mystic number, and *also* signifies the Moon! Undoubtedly a Moon-cult, and, as you say, definitely black. Everything in life has two aspects—and the worship of the Moon can be black—or white. White Diana, who brings blessings, sleep, rest, peace—and Black Nekromis, the Dark Virgin, who brings madness, terror and evil. This is some Moon-cult working under the smoke-screen of this school-business. But what's it working for, and how? That's what I've got to find out! Not only for this child, Mona, who's caught up in it . . . and on whom this Father Aloysius, if Hastie is to be believed, seems to be concentrating with a rather odd sort of intensity . . . but for the other young girls who have been drawn into it too. And perhaps for deeper reasons too—I don't know why, but I scent something very dark and dangerous here."

He examined the cross afresh, and raising his eyebrows, showed me a tiny silver loop-ring neatly concealed in the back of the bottom part of the cross.

"See that? A ring so that the cross can be worn *reversed* if necessary! Sure sign of Black Magic!"

He reached for a clean handkerchief and carefully wrapped the cross and chain inside it.

"I shall sleep with this under my pillow to-night and see if I get anything. I'm afraid I won't have a clean run-in, so to speak, as the fellow is uncannily clever and recognized me at once when he met me to-night as a fellow-magician . . . though not *his* type of magic, I'm glad to say! So he's bound to know that I'm at least a potential danger to him and his aims, whatever they may be. But we'll see—I may get something useful, if not very much."

He tucked the handkerchief with its precious contents under his pillow and turned to untie his tie with an expression of great satisfaction. But I still lingered. . . .

"There'll be a hue and cry after that thing," I said, "as soon as he finds he's lost it! And how are you going to get it returned to him without his finding out you've been examining it? He'll sense your vibrations round it, won't he, if he knows his job as an occultist?"

"Of course he will, if I don't 'cut' them, which I shall do to-morrow morning!" said Pennoyer briskly. "And I shall then give the thing, carefully wrapped in some tinfoil, which will keep it 'insulated', to you, and *you* will drop it in a flower-bed, letting it slip out of the paper without your touching it—if he picked up your vibrations on it he'd guess you might have showed it to me. And the gardener—our friend Fred Higgs, I mean—will find it there some time during the morning. I shall 'impress' him towards it. So it will bear no 'psychic finger marks' except those of poor Higgs, which will scarcely be of much service to the Reverend Father! Now you go and sleep . . . and many thanks for your help to-night. You've given me what I've been trying to find for days—a jumping-off place. Now I can get ahead."

But the night's sleep brought little information to Pennoyer. Evidently the Father had built a psychic "ring" about himself to keep out enquirers, and all Pennoyer brought back was a sense of cold and darkness behind which was a confused feeling of intensely active movement, of stealthy, concentrated evil, which confirmed his feeling that *something* very vile was afoot, but what,

it was quite impossible to define. But my friend was not depressed, and hummed cheerfully as we decended to breakfast, to find Hastie speaking at the telephone in the hall. He waved to us as we passed him, and I heard him say with a shade of impatience:

"But my dear Father, I tell you Higgs has been combing the garden ever since he came on duty at seven o'clock! I told you last night when you telephoned that as soon as it was light I'd have the place searched. . . ."

Pennoyer nudged me and grinned as we went into the breakfast-room, and helped ourselves to food—Mrs. Hastie breakfasted in bed, and Mona and her old governess had theirs together in the old schoolroom an hour earlier than the rest of the household. This arrangement pleased me, as I never feel breakfast is a "social" meal, and when in a few moments Hastie came in, we were seated drinking coffee and devouring our breakfasts with first-class appetites. The big man's fresh-coloured face bore a worried frown.

"What's wrong?" asked Pennoyer innocently.

Hastie's frown grew darker.

"That chap Aloysius on the telephone," he grunted. "He rang up last night just as I was getting into bed and told me he'd dropped his confounded cross somewhere! Was it in my garden? He didn't miss it until he got back. I told him there was no earthly use trying to find it until it grew light—tramping about with lanterns or torches 'ud merely mean somebody might plank a foot on it and ruin it. I left a note for Higgs to search for it first thing this morning, but Higgs can't find it." He helped himself lavishly to eggs and bacon and went on. "It must have dropped off on his way home. I know he had it on all the evening—you couldn't miss seeing a great staring thing like that. But it's not in the garden. . . ."

"Where's the short cut he mentioned?" I asked. "Perhaps he dropped it there?"

Hastie shrugged.

"It runs from a back gate in the kitchen-garden through the woods to his place," he said. "But he says he's had half a dozen of his people searching the path all the way along ever since sunrise. . . ."

"I expect he's very much upset about it," said Pennoyer smoothly. "It's obviously a very fine piece of jewel-work. Rather theatrical, as you say, of course, but still . . ."

"Like the man himself," said Hastie dryly. "Though I wouldn't dare say that if the women were here! They're all simply haywire about him, and it's 'Father Aloysius this' and 'Father Aloysius that' and 'Isn't he marvellous?' and so on until I don't mind confessing to you sometimes it gets my goat!"

We laughed, and he coloured apologetically.

"Sorry—I suppose I oughtn't . . ."

"Oh, it's all right. You can talk all you want before Jerry Latimer," said Pennoyer. "He's an author—that's perfectly true. But he's also a highly-trained psychic and has acted as my assistant many times . . . and that's the main reason why I wanted him down here." His penetrating eyes held Hastie's. "You can talk as frankly as you like before him. In point of fact I *want* you to tell him all the things you told me—all the things that are worrying you about Mona—so that he has a complete picture of the situation."

Hastie nodded forlornly.

"All right," he said. "Lord knows I'd welcome anybody's advice—if there's any to be given that'll help!" He got up heavily. "You chaps finished? I'll ring for the things to be cleared away, and we'll meet in half an hour, after I've walked with Mona through the woods to 'The Sanctuary'. I always take her to the door in the wall—I'm not allowed any further!" His lips twisted grimly. "Sanctuary's inviolate—parents only allowed in at stated times, and then by the front entrance! I'll wait for you by the gate into the woods. Better talk there, we won't be overheard. There's been enough talk already without adding to it."

"That'll suit us admirably," said Pennoyer with a meaning glance at me. "In half an hour then—by the little gate."

On our way to the gate Pen gave me the cross carefully wrapped in tinfoil to insulate it from all outside vibrations, and I let it slip from the paper into a bed of thyme that lay close to the path which the Father must have taken the previous evening through the kitchen garden . . . afterwards I heard that poor Higgs, who, as Pennoyer had planned, duly found and returned it to the Sanctuary, spent many hours puzzling as to how he could have overlooked it as he had "bin through them beds by the path with a small-tooth comb early that morning and it wasn't there then!"

We—or rather I—smoked a cigarette or two as we hung over

the little green gate that led from the kitchen garden out into the belt of woodland that lay behind "The Haven", and soon saw Hastie coming towards us through the trees from the direction of "The Sanctuary". He looked drawn and worried, I thought, and beckoned us to follow him—which we were not loath to do as the pine-scented shelter of the wood was welcome. The day was already warming to a promise of strong noonday heat, and it was pleasant to get into the shade. From the gate ran a well-defined track that wound away into the green depths, and Hastie nodded towards it.

"That's the short cut—the path through the woods to 'The Sanctuary'. It's only about half a mile from our house, going that way—but it's three miles round by the road. 'The Sanctuary' used to be a big house called 'Bramerside', and when it was flourishing I believe 'The Haven' was a sort of dower-house or steward's house—anyway, attached to it in some way—hence the gate and the pathway."

He indicated a comfortable grassy bank, conveniently sofa-shaped, under a group of elms and we arranged ourselves upon it to our tastes as he began, brusquely, almost curtly, as though to get a distasteful job over as soon as might be.

"I'll cut things as short as I can—and I'll warn you again, Latimer, that I've *really* precious little to tell. But here goes! I'll begin at the beginning. As Pen's probably told you, we came down here to live about five or six years ago—I'd made enough in the City to retire and live comfortably on, and both Kitty and I like country life and knew this part of the world. This house was just what we wanted, and at first everything was fine." He cleared his throat. "Mona was only about nine then—a real romp, mad on riding and tennis and games of all sorts, as bright and jolly a kid as you could find anywhere. . . ."

My eyes widened. This description did not in the least fit the plump, somnolent flapper I had encountered the previous night! Certainly he was describing a child of nine, and the Mona I had met had been fourteen . . . but still, did the onset of womanhood necessarily mean so drastic a change? I settled down to listen with increased interest as he went on.

"There were plenty of families with young people round about here that we knew, so that Mona would have lots of friends of her own age—that was one of the reasons for our deciding to settle here—and Miss Webb's always been devoted to Mona, and was willing to come too, and, as I say, at first everything went

O.K. Until about six months ago, actually, when this damned charlatan arrived!"

He paused, but we were silent and he continued, frowning in his endeavour to express himself succinctly.

"He arrived at a rather crucial moment for me, in point of fact. Two of Mona's young friends—girls living round about—had just been sent off to Paris, to a convent-school, to polish their French, and Kitty was all agog for Mona to go too. At first I turned the idea down flat—I didn't want my kid to go to France, and come back a posing, smirking, artificial little madam, all clothes and lipstick and knowing a damn sight too much about sex. Or else having her get struck with religion and want to stay in the convent for good. There's a religious streak in most women, and the R.C.s know how to play on it. . . ."

"And there's a strong mystical streak in Mona—as there was in her mother—that might make her easy to influence!" murmured Pennoyer softly.

Hastie flushed faintly and compressed his lips, but continued without further comment.

"Anyway, I didn't want her to go, even though I couldn't help realizing that for the child's own sake probably she *ought* to go. Every child ought to speak French at least, if not another language as well, and though Miss Webb had given Mona a decent grounding in French grammar, dictation and so on, so that the kid could read and write French pretty well, even I could see that the conversation part wasn't Webb's strong point, and her accent was . . . well, the less said about that the better! I suggested getting a French girl to stay *au pair*, but Kitty said that then Miss Webb would be so jealous that she'd probably leave, and even I could see that to lose her would be serious. Kitty's not strong, and an all-round factotum willing to stay buried all the year in the country isn't easy to replace! So things hung fire, until suddenly we heard that 'Bramerside'—which had been empty for years—had been taken, and was to be turned into a super-select sort of school. And this fellow Father Aloysius arrived with his Holy Circus in tow!"

He grinned a dryly amused grin.

"He'd cause a commotion anywhere, needless to say—but the excitement he roused in this sleepy hollow of a place simply can't be believed! And when after a few weeks he and his staff and his servants and the group of young-girl boarders who formed the nucleus of the school had settled in, and formal cards of invita-

tion to a reception 'to meet Father Aloysius' were sent out to all the leading families—well, the women simply swarmed to 'The Sanctuary' in droves!"

"I'll bet they did!" I said with interest. "Do go on—did you go?"

Hastie shook his head regretfully.

"Kitty went, but I didn't—I wish I had now! She came back full of it all, completely captivated, declaring Father Aloysius a marvel, his chief woman assistant—Frenchwoman called Sister Céline—the most sympathetic creature she'd ever met, the rest of the staff charming, the girls a cosmopolitan group, all exquisitely mannered, the whole scheme a godsend—just the thing for Mona! The most amazing chance . . . all the rest."

"Tell us in detail," I demanded greedily, and Hastie nodded as he went on.

"They were received by this Sister Céline in the library, a big room overlooking the garden, lined with books, with long windows and a sort of stone-paved loggia outside, with a fountain and a lawn beyond—and after a sort of preliminary talk by Sister Céline they were all ushered into a sort of lecture-hall opening off the library. Oh, I forgot to say that this Sister Céline was in white, a sort of semi-nun's robe and veil. All the women teachers are called 'Sister' Something or other and wear the same sort of robes, and the men teachers are 'Brothers', and wear grey monkish cassocks with girdles, like that fellow Kraa. The girls all wear the sort of dress that you saw Mona in last night—it's 'The Sanctuary' uniform, and all the women rave over it. I wish Mona would get back into ordinary clothes for home, but she says she doesn't feel happy now in anything else."

"How many teachers are there?" I asked.

"Ten," said Hastie, and I felt Pennoyer glance at me as he answered. "There are five men and five women, counting Sister Céline and the boss, this Aloysius. Seems to be a big staff for a small school—there are only about twenty-five or thirty girls there all told—but his lordship talks a lot about the need for individual training and attention, and if he can afford a staff of ten to teach twenty-five girls, so much the better! The servants are all natives, like that chap Kraa. God knows what race they belong to—but they're all *dumb*!"

"Tell Latimer what happened in the lecture-hall," said Pennoyer. "Your wife told you all the details, you said."

"Oh, she was full of it for days afterwards," said Hastie sourly.

"And I admit the fellow must have put over a damn well-staged show! Kitty told me the lecture-room was hung with shades of blues and purples—all very soft and dark—no windows showing, but a few round moon-coloured lamps burning. There was a rostrum at the far end with a sort of altar on it hung with dark blue velvet, and standing on that a huge silver Ball that Kitty was told represented the world, studded with sapphires and pearls and amethysts. . . ."

"It represented the Moon, not the World," said Pennoyer. "But that's a detail. Go on!"

"And there were candles in silver sconces burning each side of it," went on Hastie, "and purple glass vases filled with white flowers—moon-daisies they were, Kitty said, and that seems to me an odd sort of flower to use on an altar. And there was incense burning somewhere, and it was all very quiet. Then suddenly hidden voices began chanting, and the curtains behind the altar parted and this fellow Aloysius appeared in full regalia, and gave 'em half an hour's preaching—lecturing, *he* called it—all pseudo-magical jargon mixed up with religion ancient and modern, and bits of folk-lore and hints of Mysteries and Wonders and Rays and Vibrations and Cosmic influences and Planetary Causes . . . all that sort of stuff. It wouldn't have gone down with men, of course, but the women swallowed it all like so much jam, and came out thrilled to death and all agog to send their daughters to be taught by such a master . . . pah!"

He gave a scowl of fury and dug the heel of one stout country shoe viciously into the ground.

"Well, that was how it started! I thought it was all rather theatrical and absurd, but Kitty's a 'Roman', and the way he played up the religious aspect impressed her awfully. And in a way I didn't dislike the idea of Mona's being in that atmosphere, as long as she wasn't taken abroad and away from me. Religion—within limits—is a good thing for women."

Pennoyer shot me a faintly amused glance, but made no comment as the anxious father went on.

"I found that the head Teaching Sister, this Frenchwoman, Sister Céline, had very fine scholastic qualifications. She's a graduate of the Sorbonne and holds her Licence des Lettres and is an *agrégée* in philosophy as well, and other Sisters were educated at Girton; and of the men, two were ex-Oxford men with excellent degrees, and the German Master a D.Ph. from Bonn University. Also there were sufficient foreign girls amongst the

pupils to make the speaking of French and German necessary three days a week. . . . So I began to think that maybe here was a way of polishing up Mona's languages without sending her abroad, and to ask myself whether, just because I thought Father Aloysius' set-out rather ridiculous, I was justified in dismissing the chance it seemed to offer?" He cleared his throat. "But before I committed myself I wanted to find out more details about Father Aloysius and his crowd. I wrote to the Bishop of Plymouth, telling him frankly the position, and saying that while I had no reason to doubt that Father Aloysius was all he declared himself to be, that as a father, etc. etc., I felt it my duty to test his credentials—but I didn't draw very much. The Bishop's secretary wrote me rather cautiously to the effect that unless I could give more information regarding the Roman Catholic Order to which Father Aloysius had belonged, where he was trained and educated, etc.—which, short of asking him point-blank, I plainly could not do—they could not undertake to trace him. And it was the same when I wrote up to Westminster, to the Chancery there. . . ." He drew a long breath.

"All one could gather from Father Aloysius himself—and this was merely sketched in in conversation as he talked—was that he had lived abroad a good deal. I knew from the people in the neighbourhood who'd met him, and who'd travelled a lot—which I haven't done—that he spoke at least four languages very well, and evidently knew his Europe equally well. He used to speak casually of having studied or 'gone into retreat', or visited different Brotherhoods or Abbeys and what-not, in Sicily and Greece and Rumania. But it was all very vague, and he never gave any definite information regarding himself, his birthplace or educational career, or the name of the Order to which he had belonged before he started this 'Sanctuary' scheme. Two or three curious people tried their best to pin him down to clearer details, but they could never do it. He was as elusive as a piece of soap! Even when, in desperation at getting nothing out of Westminster about him, I invited on the spur of the moment a Jesuit friend of mine, a little priest, down to stay, and confronted the two of them, the genuine priest and the—well, in my opinion, the pseudo—I didn't get much out of it. Little Father O'Flynn—who's no fool—sat and watched our friend in the white cassock without saying much, merely asked shrewd questions now and then—which got blocked every time, of course. And afterwards, when he'd gone and I asked little O'Flynn his impression, he

shook his head doubtfully, but said he 'had no right, simply because he did not care for the flamboyance of the Father's outward appearance, to conclude that he was not a faithful son of the Church!'. . . . these Jesuits always stick together! So I got nothing either way, and I found myself in a bit of a fix. If I'd drawn nothing definitely good, I'd at least drawn nothing bad, and I really couldn't go on inventing excuses for Mona not to join—especially as the Fenwyck girl had already joined, and Lady Fenwyck's a bosom pal of Kitty's. So—Mona went, and I've never known a really peaceful moment since! "

"Why?" I demanded.

Hastie hesitated, looking a trifle shamefaced.

"I suppose it sounds silly to say I kept on feeling—though I tried hard to squash the feeling down—that there was something about all this that was—well, wasn't just as it should be," he mumbled. "But that's the way I *did* feel . . . I do still, more than ever! An uneasy sort of feeling that somehow this 'Sanctuary' business is a sort of mask—a sham. Like a fair-tent, painted with clowns and dancers and balloons and fireworks and all sorts of jolly things on the outside, but if one lifted the tent-flap and went inside one would see something quite different. Something that might be—terrifying. . . ."

Pennoyer glanced meaningly at me and I eyed Hastie with new interest. There was more psychic perception in this bluff, hearty he-man than one would have thought. . . .

"Of course," he added hastily, "that feeling wasn't as clear-cut at first as it is now! But all along I've felt oddly dissatisfied and uneasy . . . and yet it was so easily the best that offered as an alternative to sending Mona to France. . . ." He paused, and I put a question.

"Well," he said, "I suppose one's conservative about one's kids—I'd have felt happier if 'The Sanctuary' had been a school run on the ordinary lines. It all seems so cock-eyed and theatrical to me! Feeding growing girls on milk and vegetables instead of good solid meat and fish, and making 'em go about barefoot, and letting their hair grow and wearing this absurd Greek-drapery business instead of blouses and skirts, and chanting their lessons in chorus instead of saying 'em, and studying the stars and charts and diagrams instead of learning the three R's. And—*would* you believe it?—they all have to sleep on hard mattresses, on the floor, in uncurtained rooms, curled up like cats! "

I stared, but Pennoyer did not seem surprised.

"In certain psychic schools of training," he said, "they *do* advocate sleeping or meditating in that posture because it regulates the circulation of the vital fluids. Pythagoras recommended it, and Pliny says, 'During our worship we roll up, so to speak, our bodies in a circle . . . *totum corpus circumagimur*.' But a girls' school that advocates it is certainly more than just—a girls' school! Yes?"

"Well, all the girls are taught to sleep that way apparently," said Hastie. "You ought to have seen Heppy's face when she found Mona pulling her mattress off her bed at night and spreading it on the floor near the window, and pulling the curtains back—said she must sleep with the moon on her face, the Father had said so. And yet that's a thing Miriam would *never* let her do—said she was too sensitive to moon-vibrations as it was. And here's another queer thing."

He thrust a hand into his pocket and pulled out a handful of withered leaves. They seemed to be the leaves of a semi-ever-green plant, long and narrow, rather like a small laurel, and from them there emanated a queer, not unpleasant perfume that seemed to bring with it a curious misty feeling in the head. . . .

"One day she brought back a linen bag stuffed with special herbs," he said, "and insisted on using it as a pillow—again, the Father's orders! Said the herbs were good for bringing sleep—though I never remember the kid having any difficulty in sleeping in all her life. The other day I managed to sneak into her room when she was in her bath and got these out of the pillow for you to see. What *are* they?"

Pennoyer's brows were knitted in a faint frown as he sniffed and examined.

"They're the leaves of a Greek mountain plant called Diktamnos," he pronounced at last. "As far as I know, the only place it grows in—at least, that's the tale—is on the slopes of Mount Dikte, and that's a mountain dedicated to the Moon, in Crete. The leaves are used a lot by the Greeks in both medicine and magic. They're supposed to produce sleep and to soothe pain, especially the pain of childbirth . . . the Cretan women used to be laid on a bed of the plucked leaves when they were in labour." He stared thoughtfully at the dry leaves and repeated the word reflectively. "Diktamnos! Now what would he be wanting with that, I wonder? Go on, Hastie. Anything else?"

"Well," said Hastie, "it's difficult not to be boring—for really there were so many rules and regulations that seemed to me odd

and unnecessary! For instance, none of the girls are allowed to come out of 'The Sanctuary' to tea or anything like that, *alone*. They only come when accompanied by one of the Sisters, and not often then. Seem to be practically cloistered in 'The Sanctuary'! Once or twice Mona *did* invite two of the girls home to tea, and they arrived escorted by one of the younger Sisters—somebody called Sister Melitta. And though Kitty raved about their manners and poise and all that, it struck me they were awfully queer and quiet for a couple of kids in their early teens, and sort of seemed to have to look at Sister Melitta before they could say anything. Might have been just shy, of course, but I watched 'em with Mona in the garden when Sister Melitta was in the drawing-room with Kitty, and even then they didn't seem to loosen up a bit. Just wandered about rather listlessly and talked to each other now and then—no giggling or laughter or nonsense, and it somehow didn't feel to me just right. Afterwards I asked Mona if they were all like that, and she said yes, they were a quiet lot on the whole—though she said it hadn't struck her until I mentioned it. Again, they're in the open a lot, but there are no sports! It appears Eurhythmics and plastic posing—whatever that may mean—and exercises in Poise and Balance are better for the growing girl—at least according to his lordship—than honest-to-God golf or tennis!" He paused a moment and went on in a graver tone.

"But it was the change in Mona that began to get me really worried! She's changed almost beyond belief in the last six months. Before she went to that place she was as slim as a reed—just like her mother, bright eyes, rosy cheeks, active, bursting with vitality and fun—but now she's flabby and overfat, and as lethargic as she used to be full of energy. And I'm sure—I'm *dead* sure—that it's something far deeper and more serious than merely the usual change that comes over a young girl in her early teens! Kitty and Miss Webb insist that that's all it is, of course, because Father Aloysius and his echo, Sister Céline, say so—so they either laugh at me or get irritated." He threw out his arms in a gesture of impotent despair. "But I swear I'm right! I'm the girl's father, and I *know* I'm right! During the last three or four months she's changed—almost appallingly!"

Pennoyer nodded to me.

"It's quite true," he said. "I was shocked at the change in Mona. Matter of fact, that was the first thing that put me on the alert. It's not a normal change."

"She's lost all her old keenness on games," went on the forlorn father. "She's always listless and dreamy now, and goes to sleep on the smallest provocation! She hates the sun too—and she used to love it. *Now* she'd stay in the house all day if I let her, and even when she's out she'll keep in the shade and wear dark glasses . . . she doesn't seem able to face the sun any more. And she's grown so absentminded that she often doesn't seem to hear what one says to her! She only really comes to life when that confounded fellow's around—did you see her last night? She turns to him like a flower to the sun . . . like something hypnotized! I *know* it's unhealthy, I can feel it in my bones, but these damned silly women are so crackers about him that they egg her on, and I've got to sit and look on. . . ."

He stopped, flushing awkwardly.

"I'm sorry—that sounded rather raw. I didn't mean to be rude about Kitty, but you know . . ." His hot unhappy eyes begged our pardon, and Pennoyer leant over and laid a soothing hand on his square red fist.

"It's all right, old man," he said. "We understand—and they don't, that's all. Go on, tell Latimer about when you interviewed the Holy Father."

"*Did* you?" I said with interest. "What about?"

"Well," said Hastie, "apart from the gradual physical change in the kid, there were other things that began to get me, after a while, really seriously bothered."

He glanced half-apologetically at Pennoyer.

"The truth is, Latimer, that Mona's inherited her mother's gift of mediumship—unfortunately, *I* think, though I know Pen won't agree with me. The kid's 'seen' and 'heard' things ever since she was born, but I've always discouraged it. I don't like that sort of thing, though I don't deny it exists . . . suppose I'm afraid of it, if I'm truthful, and I thought I'd managed to make her forget all about it. Miss Webb and I together. . . ."

"You'd never do that," commented Pennoyer idly. "You'd only drive it underground, make the child hide her gifts instead of taking them naturally and valuing them as they deserve. I've told you before, you made a mistake here, Ran. First with your wife and then with your daughter. But go on."

Hastie's lips took on a stubborn line, but he proceeded.

"Well, some time after she joined 'The Sanctuary' Mona took to staying behind after ordinary school hours, sometimes going back there after dinner at night—for 'special coaching' she said,

with the Father. I was puzzled, as she'd only been there a few weeks and there couldn't be an exam in preparation yet—and anyway, why should she be singled out for special training over and above the other girls? Two or three times a week she used to go, and apparently be closeted with him in some sort of a private room for God knows how long. . . .”

“You don't suggest . . .” I began, but Hastie shook his head.

“Oh no—nothing of *that* kind! According to Mona there was always the woman Sister Céline there, and sometimes one or two of the other assistants, and at least once the whole staff! Again, that seemed odd, for private coaching, and at last I got really curious and began to question her in detail. And what she told me made me begin to sit up and scratch my head pretty seriously. . . .”

“What did she tell you?” I asked.

“Oh, she said that the first time she went there she was made to lie down on a couch while they all stood around the couch with linked hands, and then this Father Aloysius put his hands on her forehead and said some words she didn't understand and she went off to sleep . . . and when she awakened, she said, they were all talking excitedly together and seemed fearfully pleased and jubilant, and Sister Céline was putting away a notebook and pencil as though she had been taking something down. And sometimes she was put on a chair and made to repeat lines in a queer language after Father Aloysius, and anointed with oil and given wine to drink while they all chanted, and once or twice they brought a crystal bowl and poured water into it and made her look into it and say what she saw . . . and once, she said, she remembered being taken out into the garden when the moon was full and they set her in the middle and sort of danced round her and did poo-jah, and if all this is special coaching, it's coaching of a sort that I don't like or approve of!” Hastie's healthy red face was dark with anger. “So I wrote asking for a special interview with this fellow . . . but would you believe it, when I saw him he managed to talk me round? *Me!*”

He looked from Pennoyer to me and back again with an expression of amazed resentment that would have been comic if he had not been pathetic. Poor kindly, simple John Bull in the hands of a Master of Evil. . . .

“How he explained it all away I really couldn't tell, but he was as plausible as the devil! Declared that all that Mona had described was merely some of his rather unusual methods of

awakening and concentrating a pupil's mental powers. But surely there was nothing in all this to distress me? Certainly, he admitted, and even boasted of, the fact that his methods of teaching were unorthodox, but he prided himself on his results! And since, he said, Mona was easily one of his most promising pupils, he hoped and believed that I would agree to his continuing to give her special attention—though naturally if I preferred him to use more ordinary methods, he would bow to my wishes."

"And *did* he?" I asked.

"I don't know," admitted Hastie. "All I know is that since then, if I question Mona, all I get is a description of a perfectly ordinary evening's work with a perfectly ordinary coach! And I can't believe . . ."

"Of course you can't," said Pennoyer. "The fellow took fright when he found she'd been telling you too much, and now takes the trouble to expunge from her mind everything that takes place when she goes to him for these so-called 'special training' sessions." He frowned. "Special training is the right word, too! He obviously spotted her exceptional mediumistic gifts and promptly started training them. . . ."

"That's what I guessed," put in Hastie. "Though when he was talking to me I swallowed what he said by way of excuse, when I got away I realized he'd hazed me, turned me round his little finger, and I began to worry again. . . ."

"Why haven't you, as you feel this way about it all, made her leave and sent her to France, away from this man?" I asked bluntly.

Hastie looked at me with unhappy eyes.

"I wish I had now," he said gloomily. "But there wasn't enough to go on in the beginning, as I've told you, except my own prejudice. And he sang me to sleep, as I've just told you, with most damnable success when I tried to make a stand—and now, if I wanted to take her away, I doubt whether I could enforce it! The chap's got Kitty and Miss Webb completely on his side as well as Mona, and if they were all against me I don't see *how* I could make the kid leave!"

"You could refuse to pay her fees," I said.

Hastie shrugged.

"Kitty's got money of her own," he grunted. "She'd pay 'em! No, there's no way out that way." He sighed wretchedly. "That's why I was so thankful to see Pen. I was just getting to such a pitch of worry and—well, yes, fear—of this slimy devil. . . ."

"Maybe you've got something there!" commented Pennoyer, rising to his feet. "But don't distress yourself, old man. You've told Latimer quite enough for him to get the hang of the situation—now leave it to us to try and find out what's really happening and what we can do about it. You go off and have a round of golf, or go for a good tramp, and I'll have a talk to Latimer."

Hastie nodded and strode off in the direction of his garden, and Pennoyer turned to me.

"And as for you and me," he said, "we'll go and pay a short visit, I think, to the outskirts at least of this famous Sanctuary!"

The short cut for once did not belie its name. A stroll of barely ten minutes through the odorous pine-woods brought us to a wall, a tall and solid rampart of grey stone-work thickly covered with ancient ivy—the wall round the old property of "Bramerside", now "The Sanctuary". The path we had been following led up to a small green postern door, set flat in the stone-work—a door that was securely fastened with a padlock and chain.

Pennoyer eyed the wall speculatively for a minute. The thick-twisting stems of the ancient ivy provided excellent footholds, there were several low-branched trees set conveniently near the wall and we were both lean and active, so within two minutes we were sitting, like two schoolboys, astride the top of the wall, surveying the prospect on the other side. Not that "prospect" is the word, since it implies a wide and spreading view, and from where we sat all we could see was a positive wall of trees with shrubs and bushes beneath them that had grown, in the course of years, almost as tall as the trees themselves. There were twelve and sixteen-foot-high masses of rhododendrons, laurels and laurustinus, arbutus and so on, sprawling abroad in wild and magnificent profusion, through which a narrow moss-grown path ran winding away from the door—though the gardens might have been well kept enough near the house, hereabouts they had certainly not been touched for years.

"Whatever trouble the worthy Father may have taken to tidy up the garden near the house, he hasn't bothered about the outskirts!" commented Pennoyer. "Like a lazy housemaid who dusts where it shows and never goes behind the cupboards and pictures! Come on over. I want to spy out the land."

"What, in broad daylight?" I protested. "I thought this was

a place inviolate except for the chosen few! Won't we look awful fools if we're caught snooping?"

"We won't be caught as long as we stick to this wild part. It's plain that nobody ever comes round here," said Pennoyer, "and in point of fact, we're probably safer venturing into the garden by day than by night. During the day the worthy Father and his colleagues will surely be doing something in the way of training their flock, so will be safely in the house with their attention well occupied!"

"Wouldn't it be safer for you to come here in your astral body—during sleep?" I asked.

Knowing that Pennoyer possessed that rare gift, trained to a hair, of being able not only to bring back the precise memory of where he had been travelling in his astral body, but to direct that travelling where he would, the suggestion seemed to be a sound one—but Pennoyer shook his head.

"Again, we're safer in the flesh," he said, "odd as it sounds! With his vast knowledge that fellow could not but recognize a brother-magician at once, and therefore after meeting me last night he would be, and in fact almost certainly *is*, on the look out for an astral visitor—but the last thing he would suspect is that I would descend to climbing walls and snooping round bushes in my physical body. I came here last night, in point of fact, when I had that cross under my pillow, in my astral body, so I know my way about the garden, though I couldn't get into the house or near the fellow himself. They're both guarded on the Inner Planes. And though I *could* have forced an entrance, it would have advertised my presence so obviously that I didn't. So don't worry. There's that old garden seat just below that'll act as a springboard for a flying leap over the wall in case of a quick get-away! Come on."

He dropped lightly down to the seat and thence to the ground—and with, I admit, a somewhat uneasy heart, I followed blindly in his wake.

It was plain that Pennoyer had visited the grounds before, as he had said, for after following the path for a few yards he turned aside and plunged in amongst the massed bushes. Dismayed, but reflecting that I was in for it now, I kept close to his heels, and after a moment I realized that we were using yet another path, though old and much overgrown, probably a gardener's path that led round behind the shrubs and bushes to some potting-shed, summer-house or the like on the further side of the

grounds . . . in point of fact, I found afterwards that it went to a group of greenhouses, cold-frames, compost-heaps, toolsheds and so on which were still in use, though the old path was not. Pennoyer led the way without hesitation, and within a few minutes we halted in the heart of a mass of greenery, through the interstices of which could be plainly seen a spreading lawn that ran back to a stretch of marble *pavé* with a spouting fountain in the centre, set in a sunken pool with a low marble kerb running round it, and behind that a row of white Grecian pillars that formed the supports of a glass-roofed loggia belonging to a handsome Palladian-fronted mansion.

It was plain that this was the scene that Hastie had described as being "outside the library window", and the room that one could faintly discern behind the pillars of the loggia was that same library in which Sister Céline had received the Master's visitors.

It was evidently the morning recess, for as we watched, a group of young girls, none of whom were more than sixteen and several very much younger, emerged from the house and scattered themselves about the garden, strolling about the lawn, reading in the shadow of the loggia or sitting on the marble kerb of the pool dabbling their hands in the water. They were all barefoot and clad in the straight white semi-Greek robe that was the school uniform, and I did not see Mona amongst them—but we were some distance away, and she might have been there. At first I thought what a singularly pretty picture they made, until something struck me as being oddly *wrong* about the picture. I could not for two or three minutes quite place what it was, and then it dawned on me, and I remembered Hastie's comment—all the girls were so singularly *quiet*! Normally speaking, if a bunch of twenty or thirty youngsters in their early teens are released from school there is a sharp reaction from the repression of the school-room in the shape of laughter, chatter, shouted comments, teasing, romping, all that sort of thing—but these young things moved about almost like creatures under hypnotism. Apathetic, spiritless. . . .

"That," said Pennoyer in my ear, "is what fools like Kitty Hastie and her crony Lady Fenwyck describe as 'perfect manners'!" Pennoyer nodded towards the grouped girls, his keen eyes narrowed like a hawk. "Look at those! That's little Molly Fenwyck—used to be a great pal of Mona's, a regular little demon, full of bounce and fun. Look at her! As limp and list-

less as the rest—they're like a string of Sullivan's lovesick maidens! Ah, here comes the Father's Head Partner, Sister Céline—Selene! Again the Moon—note, you see, the *leit-motiv* of the whole place. . . .”

A tall, slender, haggard woman in a long white nun-like robe, wearing a white coif upon her head—a coif that was faintly reminiscent of the folded linen head-dress that one sees in Egyptian sculptures—came out into the sunshine. She was barefoot, like the girls, and carried in one hand an odd little object of silver that glittered in the sun. She crossed the loggia, passed the pool with its spouting fountain, and came out upon the lawn, and as she came the girls all rose silently to their feet and stood awaiting orders, as it were—and again the difference between these girls and ordinary normal schoolgirls struck me very forcibly.

The advent of a popular mistress—and according to Mona, Sister Céline was only a shade less popular than the Father himself—would create *some* sort of a stir! The bolder girls would run to her, hang on her arms, speak to her, even the shy ones would draw near, hoping for a smile or a word . . . but these girls simply rose and stood like automatons, awaiting the word of command.

“Automatons—you've got it,” said Pennoyer in my ear, picking up the word even as I thought it. “These girls are acting like zombies—like creatures who haven't got wills of their own! They are obeying orders . . . whether they are drugged or hypnotized, or both together, I don't know, but *certainly* they aren't normal! Now what's she going to do?”

I peered eagerly through the twisting stems of the bushes that hid us. Sister Céline was speaking, though we were too far off to hear what she said, and as she spoke the girls gathered themselves obediently into a long double line and stood waiting as she raised the shining thing in her hand—which I saw now was a small silver triangle—and struck it with a silver rod. It rang out a thin shrill note, which the girls took up in a curious ululating sound, half-chant, half-cry, melancholy, quavering, high—a sound with an oddly-piercing quality about it that seemed to penetrate some mental defence and leave me naked, shivering, bewildered . . . and frightened!

With the sound, the line of girls surged forward in a single movement, raising their arms at an angle curiously suggestive of some archaic dance movement, recoiled and surged forward

again, all the while keeping up this queer thin wailing cry. . . . It was broad daylight and a lovely sunshiny day, but suddenly everything seemed to go cloudy and queer and I clutched Pennoyer's arm in panic . . . what on earth was happening to me? I heard Pen's voice firmly in my ear, felt his right hand, thumb on one side, first and second fingers on the other, grip my temples between them and press hard, with the wringing movement that awakens a medium from trance—and suddenly the air was clear, and I was staring through a screen of green leafage at the strange rhythmic movements of a row of girls, but I could not hear a sound! Pen had temporarily "closed" my ears, so as to protect me from that sinister hooning chant. . . .

Tearing a leaf from the notebook he always carried, he scribbled a line on it.

"Get out, quickly, over the wall, and wait for me by the side of the path where we talked to Ran this morning. Hurry! My sealing of your ears won't last many seconds!"

I needed no pushing, but ran like a rabbit—I'd been badly scared! I vaulted the wall, with the help of the garden-seat, and ten minutes later I was curled comfortably against the sofa-shaped bank, my hearing completely normal once more, ruminating upon the curious experience through which I had just passed.

I was still ruminating, shaken and puzzled and not a little frightened, when Pennoyer appeared at my side. He was smiling, and in one hand I saw he was holding a torn piece of paper . . . he held it out to me as he dropped down beside me on the grass, and I saw that it was a sheet of notes, figures and so on.

"What are you looking so pleased about?" I asked interestedly. "Is it some sort of a code?"

"No," said Pennoyer. "It's only a few scribbled notes—nothing important in themselves! *But*—it's in Father Aloysius' handwriting!" His voice was jubilant. "I've managed to get something belonging to him that he hasn't thought of 'protecting' . . . and to-night I'm going into the Silence with it, to see what I can get."

"How on earth did you get it?" I asked.

Pennoyer explained that after I left he worked his way slowly and cautiously through the shrubberies up to the house to where the bushes came very close to the house itself, at the side. In his astral inspection of the previous night he had discovered that

here was situated the main class-room—once the billiard-room of “Bramerside”—and close to it a small study sacred to the use of the Father; possibly the room in which Mona’s “extra coaching” took place, unless this happened, as Pennoyer subsequently decided, in a secret inner room of the house specially prepared and conditioned, psychically speaking, for this end.

But in this small study the worthy Father did a good deal of his work during the daytime. He did little actual teaching himself, I subsequently learnt, confining himself to occasional lectures, given in the lecture-hall . . . always a farrago of mystical, magical stuff, fascinating and impressive to young brains . . . and to “demonstrations” of various kinds, all devoted to making the growing minds and characters under his care more and more malleable to his will. I don’t know what all these consisted of, they were of various kinds, but one, Mona subsequently told us, took place in a darkened room, with revolving lights and globes, colours and rays projected upon a sort of cinema screen and accompanied by strange and monotonous music. We could never, in after days, get any very clear description of these evenings from Mona, but she used to declare that all the girls used to emerge from them dazed and mentally confused and oddly sleepy. But all used to long for the next time to come round again, as a drug-taker longs for his beloved poison. . . .

Well, this is in parenthesis, and I will go on with what Pennoyer told me. Arrayed in a plain white serge cassock, with a pearl and silver cross and a black skullcap hiding his tonsure, the Father was writing at a table close to the open window. He was writing with a long blue quill pen, dealing with accounts of some sort, it seemed, and for some time Pennoyer stood and watched the man, analysed the handsome, imperious face, and speculated on him and what he was after, and what he really wanted with Mona. But in his wildest dreams he never came near imagining the truth. . . .

With all his might Pen sent out an S O S to the White Brothers to help him to get *something* that would enable him to put himself, unbeknown, in touch with the brilliant, evil, ruthless mind behind that handsome mask . . . and behold, they heard and answered!

There was a knock at the door of the study, and in answer to the Father’s impatient “Come in!” his special attendant Kraa entered—evidently with the news that Fred Higgs had arrived as he carried the amethyst cross in one hand.

With an exclamation of satisfaction Father Aloysius seized it, thrust his pen into its holder, a purple glass vase half filled with glass beads for drying the pen, pushed back his chair and strode from the room—evidently to thank and tip the worthy Higgs—leaving his papers lying loose all over the desk. Within three minutes a little errant breeze came through the open window, lifted a dozen sheets up and scattered them outside, amongst the bushes . . . and Pen, with a rejoicing heart, was making his way back through the shrubbery to the postern gate, the treasure tucked carefully within his wallet!

"So now—I've got him!" he finished grimly. "Now I can find out what he's after . . . and that means, I hope and believe, that I can find a cure."

"He's bound to write a note of thanks to Mrs. Hastie for returning the cross," I said. "Wouldn't that piece of writing have done as well? We could easily have got the envelope at least, if not the note."

Pennoyer shook his head.

"He's too wary!" he said. "Set a thief to catch a thief—and since we met, our friend will be *very* careful to send nothing to 'The Haven' that isn't perfectly 'protected', so that I can't pick up anything from it. He knows very well how psychically valuable an object is that has been in close contact with a person, and how much it can tell! I'll bet you anything that he will have put Fred Higgs through a thorough pumping so as to find out if either you or I have touched that cross and chain. Poor Fred, how puzzled he'll be! But you'll see I'm right."

I had seen Pennoyer do what he called "going into the Silence", several times before—had stood guard over him during the experience, indeed, for it was imperative that while he was away from his body no outside interruption took place to cause a brusque awakening. To be roused from deep trance by any sort of a shock is dangerous, as it may result in dire damage to the physical or mental structure of the entranced subject. Though in Pennoyer's flat, surrounded as it was by a psychic wall of force that was impregnable, a personal guard was never needed, yet when in a strange house he found it necessary to use this method of contacting his Brothers on the Other Side, a guard was essential—and I was proud to be trusted with the post.

Directly the house was quiet and everyone sleeping that night, I arranged the sacred Persian prayer-rug that was always carried

in the "bogey-bag" in the centre of the floor—we had pushed the bedstead up against the wall so as to leave the room as clear as possible. I placed the carved ivory Chinese headrest that likewise always travelled in the bogey-bag, ready for his head, turned all the lights out but for the reading-lamp beside the bed—which I covered with a piece of soft red silk so as to turn its bright glow to a dim ruby—and while I did this Pennoyer went along to the bathroom, stripped and bathed himself from head to foot, and donned the soft dark blue woollen robe, cowed, and girdled with a knotted cord, that he always kept for these occasions. He nodded with satisfaction as he came back into the room and noted my preparations, and stood looking round the room for a moment in silence. He looked fresh and alert—which was more than I felt, as we had had nothing to eat all day, a necessity for both of us on these occasions. By way of evading awkward questions, we had gone on a long tramp to Treleathen, a beauty-spot some miles away, and remained away until long after dinner. For appearance' sake we had had to accept the picnic-lunch with which Miss Webb had insisted upon providing us, and had brought it back intact, though I had been sorely tempted to break it open more than once during the day! But by this time I knew too well the importance of fasting before an important psychic task such as the one that now faced us. My job would be merely that of a "psychic battery" on which Pen could draw for power—but that battery must be clean and strong. My friend would need all the power he could get to make contact with his Brothers on the Other Side, and maintain it for as long as might be needed! And if the channel from which he must draw the power was clogged with food and drink, the supply would be poorer, as mud clogs and makes cloudy and impure a stream that should run swift and clear. . . .

Sometimes in the past I had been inclined to rebel at the strict *régime* that had to be observed when I acted as Miles Pennoyer's assistant. But I was too keenly interested in this case to feel anything but eagerness to help, and I forgot my hunger as I watched Pennoyer drink down the glass of cold spring water that he always took before going into trance, smile faintly at me, and folding his robe about him, lie down flat on his back on the prayer-rug and adjust the headrest comfortably beneath his head.

"Lock the door, Jerry," he said, "and then sit down as you always do, loosely and comfortably in that low chair. Don't cross your legs or hands, remember—that keeps back the flow of

power, and I want all you can give me to-night, even if you're whacked to the wide to-morrow!" His dark eyes glowed affectionately at me from where he lay, in the faint glow of the red light. "I've built a ring of protection around this room, and willed extra-deep sleep upon all under this roof . . . the only thing that *might* try and break through would be our friend Aloysius, and I fancy he's far too busy elsewhere to bother! Anyway, if someone tries to get you to open the door, refuse to open it on any account. You know that this room *must* remain inviolate until I get back into my body. You understand? Good! Bless you! Until my return . . ."

With a final smile at me he placed his arms straight at his sides, set his feet close together, closed his eyes—and silence, utter and complete, descended upon the red-lit room.

I settled myself into my chair. I had taken off my shoes, my jacket, collar and tie, and put on my dressing-gown and a scarf for comfort, though it was a warm June night. I knew something of the icy cold that could descend upon a room when the psychic power was working, and had provided myself with a rug and a thermos flask full of hot tea besides.

As Pennoyer would be outside his body he did not know or care how cold it became, but as I perforce had to remain within mine, for God knows how many hours before Pen returned to his, its comfort was a matter of considerable moment to me!

I do not know how long I sat there. From where I sat the little clock on the bedside table was not visible, and also I was absorbed, as I always was, in watching the face of my friend as slowly, surely, he withdrew from his physical body, leaving it just alive, an animated shell, but that was all. All that was Miles Pennoyer—Miles Pennoyer and a score of other, greater names that his personality had worn in its long list of incarnations—slowly faded out, leaving behind it a motionless figure, limp and waxen, breathing so slowly that one could scarcely see that it breathed at all, flat on the Persian rug at my feet. The face became shrunken, older, more lined, and slowly it seemed to take on the aspect of a mummy of some long-dead king, noble in feature, splendid, a thousand years old. Even the hands, long, limp, lying each side of the lean body in the dark blue woollen robe, looked different, thinner, more clawlike . . . and I realized that I was looking upon the true age of Miles Pennoyer! In this frail, silent body, barely breathing, I saw the epitome of all the lives he had spent on earth . . . and all of them, I would swear,

spent in the service of his fellow-men! All the ages of his many lives seemed to express themselves in this one small withered shape. . . .

Then suddenly—so suddenly that I started—he raised a hand and made a curious motion, as though knocking at a door invisible to me. And lo—faintly, with my inner ear that was sufficiently trained to hear it, I heard that knock! A sound distant, hollow, profound, as though made at a door ancient and strong, closed fast against all invaders. . . .

There was a pause, and somehow I sensed in that pause the opening of a grille, that Those within might see who knocked—and then the raised hand of my friend inscribed in the air a strange Salute. There was a pause, and I knew from the faint smile that dawned on Miles Pennoyer's face that that Salute had been seen—and recognized. The Door stood open! Another pause, and he spoke, a brief word or so in an unknown tongue—a password or words, that was plain. Then came the sound of the Door closing as he passed within, and a long pause during which I knew he must be traversing the courts, corridors, stairs—whatever lay between the Outer Doorway and the Council Chamber; then once more he made the Salute and the Greeting—the Brothers awaited him—and began to speak at length. It would be no use to ask me what he said, for again, he spoke in a language of which I have no knowledge—a sonorous, beautiful tongue that is no longer used on earth.

He spoke at intervals, as though waiting for answers, and I watched the expressions chase themselves one after another across the lined and haggard face on the ivory headrest. I knew he was asking advice on the problem of the child Mona, and my heart was in suspense as he frowned, shook his head, listened eagerly, smiled diffidently as though in acknowledgement of some praise or word of cheer, seemed to argue, or bowed in reverent submission, and as I listened I had a queer mental vision of a large chamber that somehow I knew was subterranean. A chamber floored with mosaic and marble, hung with gorgeously-coloured tapestry and lighted with exquisitely soft and shaded lights, with a ring of carved and gilded seats, tall-backed, throne-like, at one end, raised on a dais, and on each sat a hooded figure in a robe of yellow. And before the figures stood Miles Pennoyer in his plain blue robe, speaking earnestly and eagerly, gesticulating with his long fine hands. . . . It was but a flash, and gone in a blink of the eyes, but I knew that I had been granted a glimpse of my

friend as he talked with his Brothers in the Council Chamber of the great Secret Order to which he belonged, and I settled myself down to wait his return as patiently as I could.

I had not long to wait now. For some time longer Pennoyer lay silent, only nodding his head now and then as though in understanding of instructions that were being given him . . . then he raised his right hand again in salute, spoke a single ringing word, and I heard, somewhere deep down within me, the sound of a closing door. The Conference was over. . . .

Within a few minutes my friend opened his eyes, as quietly as though awakening from sleep, yawned, shivered and sat up, and I rushed to his side with the hot cup of tea that was always his first need after these astral journeys of his. I noticed as I knelt beside him that his preternaturally aged look had completely vanished, but his eyes were dark and grave; and though he nodded and smiled his thanks as I held the cup to his lips, he did not say anything for several minutes, but stared before him with a grim expression, his lips compressed, his jaw set.

I knew better than to try and make him talk. It generally took him five to ten minutes to come completely "round" after these adventures, so I busied myself in unpacking the lunch that I had carried about all day—and brought back with me. I was glad now that I had withstood the temptation to open it! I was by now really desperately hungry, and though the ham sandwiches were dry and curled, they were eatable still, and luckily for Pennoyer there was cheese and some tomatoes and a few biscuits, two or three apples and a handsome lump of fruit-cake, so within two minutes we were munching happily. But Pen still maintained his sombre expression, and at last I ventured a query. He nodded.

"Yes, I got what I wanted. I had sent out several urgent messages for help and advice earlier in the day and the Brothers were assembled in full meeting for me."

"I saw them—just for a flash," I said. "A marvellous sort of room—Council Chamber, Hall of Audience, I don't know what it was—with hooded figures in yellow sitting round a high dais, and you talking to them."

Pennoyer smiled faintly.

"They aren't *really* hooded—that is, they weren't to me," he said. "They were to you because you aren't an Initiate yet, so the sight of the faces of the Brothers is denied you. But I know you caught a glimpse of Them—I asked for you to be allowed

this. And I have also asked permission for you to be present, in the spirit—though you can't be in the body—at the last act of the drama that concerns this child Mona."

My eyes gleamed.

"Marvellous! Then you've found out what it is, and how to deal with it?"

Pennoyer's face was sombre.

"I've found out what it is—and what this Father Aloysius is trying to do. And I'm still stunned by the realization of the frightful evil he was planning to bring into the world . . . may still, if I fail!" He drew a long breath. "My God . . . the Prince of the Powers of Darkness indeed. What a plot! What a devilishly brilliant, wicked piece of scheming."

He fell to brooding again, chewing his apple thoughtfully, and I waited with what patience I could muster, knowing from past experience it was useless to try and hurry him. He would tell me in his own time—but not before. Suddenly he roused himself and spoke briskly.

"I'll tell you everything—*when* it's all over. Now listen—these are your instructions for the coming day. Tell Kitty Hastie I've got a touch of the sun and will be glad if I can stay in my room all day—I must prepare myself for a big ordeal, which means no food again, and I really can't be bothered with trying to invent excuses. *You* needn't starve, as you won't be coming with me, but don't touch red meat, tobacco or alcohol, there's a good fellow? I'm facing a terrific job, that of not only saving this child, but saving the world from a calamity, the like of which has never been seen before! To-morrow night is Mona's birthday—and the date this devil has planned for the Rite in which he means to use her, poor child!"

He rose from the floor and going to the window, held back the curtains and peered out. The cool silver light of dawn was lighting the sky . . . he dropped the curtains and turned towards the bed.

"I'm all in—and you must be too. Put away the rug and the headrest, there's a good fellow—and then go and get some sleep."

I spent the following day in such a suppressed fever of excitement that I wonder nobody noticed anything odd in my manner. I had made Pennoyer's excuses with success, and got through the day as best I could, playing a round of golf with Hastie in the

morning, sleeping in the afternoon, talking amiable nothings to Mrs. Hastie and a group of friends at tea-time, and helping Miss Webb—who among a score of other jobs took a practical interest in the garden—to weed some of the flower-beds. Mona returned from "The Sanctuary" about six o'clock, and for a time I attached myself to her: but she was restless and *distracte* and soon made off to her own sanctum, the old schoolroom, on the pretext of having homework to do.

She did not appear again. Miss Webb appeared at dinner-time, with a faintly worried expression and the news that her charge had a headache and would rather "skip" dinner. . . . I had no difficulty in guessing that the poor enslaved child was spending the evening "preparing" herself for the night's experiences, much as Pennoyer was preparing himself. How much she had been told of the Rite that lay before her I never knew. But that she had been for some time past being trained for some particularly important experiment, that she surely *did* know!

Somehow the long evening drew to a close, and at long last, having made certain that all the family were safely shut within their own quarters, I knocked on the door of Pennoyer's room. I found him sitting in his chair by the window, wearing a dark shirt and trousers, and a bundle tied in a handkerchief at his side. On the floor was spread the Persian prayer-rug, and the lamp was again draped with red. . . . Astonished, I stared at it, and he smiled faintly.

"That's not for me—it's for you," he said. "But I won't insist that you use the headrest—you're not trained to that yet. You can use a pillow instead. You must lie there while I go to 'The Sanctuary'—not in my astral body, but in my physical. I must confront in the flesh this Entity who uses the name of Father Aloysius, since *he* will be in the flesh. I have all I need with me here." He patted the bundle. "But before I go, I'm going to put you into trance here on this rug, and open your Third Eye so that in spirit you will be able to follow me and see what happens."

He slipped a ring from his little finger—a green scarab I had often seen him wear.

"You'll not be disturbed. I have made a 'ring' round this room that will be proof against anything but this devil—and he'll be too busy with me to bother about anything else."

"I'll do anything you say," I said obediently. "But I'm worried, Pen. Why couldn't you—or *They*—have nipped this

business in the bud before it got to such a dangerous pitch? Before . . ."

"Because," said Pennoyer, "I wasn't called in early enough! If I'd contacted this fellow earlier, I'd have warned Hastie and sent Mona away to France, before he got a grip of her. It's like preventing an abscess forming—one *can* do that, but only in the very early stages. After the poison's got a grip on the place, one has to wait until it's ready for operating—no use trying to lance an abscess till it's ripe! So I had to wait till the night of the Rite to lance this Spiritual abscess, and let out the evil. Don't worry—the Brothers are with me. It will be all right. Put this ring on your finger—it will keep you linked with me, so that though we shall not be physically together, I can still draw on you for power. . . . I shall need all I can get, unless I'm much mistaken! Now, lie down."

Such was the power already emanating from him that I did as I was told at once—only raising a faint protest.

"But Pen—I know you're going into danger. Can't I come with you?"

"You *will* be with me—in the best way possible," said my friend. "But I dare not take you in the body! Brave as you are, Jerry, your physical body might not be able to avoid shrinking or shivering, and that would be fatal. *He* would sense our presence at once . . . and a second's show of fear would make us vulnerable. Now . . . lie down and go to sleep."

The last thing I remembered was the pressure of Pennoyer's lean fingers on the centre of my forehead . . . a strange throbbing sensation there, that mingled with a feeling of rapidly falling asleep . . . the sound of Pennoyer's voice as he murmured strange words, half a chant and half a prayer . . . and then everything passed from me as I fell asleep.

It seemed untold ages that I was asleep, and yet a few minutes only can have passed before I awoke and found myself standing upright beside the Persian rug, looking down upon my body, lying deeply sunk in sleep.

It was not the first time that Pennoyer had sent my physical body into trance in order to release my "astral", or etheric, body to accompany him upon one of his adventures, and I had seen myself while standing *outside* myself several times before—but it never failed to give me a queer shock to find myself looking so different from what I had expected! It is not often realized

that we never truly see ourselves while we inhabit our physical bodies, since the face we see in the mirror is reversed, so not a true reflection at all—and I spent a moment or two staring curiously at myself, noting rather ruefully that I looked both older and less good-looking than I had imagined, and certainly a great deal less intelligent than I had hoped! I noted the gleam of the green ring on the little finger of my right hand, and even as I looked at it I felt the “pull” that was the psychic summons of my friend—and instantly, without knowing how I made the transit, I found myself standing beside Pennoyer, outside in the moonlight kitchen-garden, in the shadow of some six-foot-high bean-rows.

Pennoyer nodded at me—thanks to his gifts he could see me and we could communicate by thought-speech, though he was still in the flesh and I in my astral body—I wondered why he was waiting, but even as the wonder crossed my mind I saw a window on the first floor open softly and Mona’s head appear. She looked cautiously round, then threw a leg over the sill, climbed out, dropped, with an expertness that told of long practice, to the flat roof of a toolshed that was built against the wall just beneath her window, and from the roof swung herself lightly to the ground. She wore a dark-coloured “gym” tunic and “bloomers” to match, so that but for the pale blur of her face she looked, as she stood looking warily about her, just another shadow among the crowding shadows about us—then, apparently satisfied that the garden was empty, she went quickly down the pathway to the little gate and disappeared into the shadow of the copse.

Without a word Pennoyer moved after her, though how he was going to keep her in sight I could not imagine, as in the shadow of the trees, in her dark clothes, she would be quite as invisible as I was. But after a moment I realized that Pen was not worrying about following her. He knew she was going to “The Sanctuary”, answering the Father’s etheric call, as she had obviously done scores of times before while her people slept and he was letting her get ahead—letting everything, so to speak, get well started before he stepped in. That this was not the first time by many that Mona Hastie had been “drawn” by the hypnotic power that had been already established over her, to the dark centre of mysteries that was “The Sanctuary” was plain. But I was still completely in the dark as to the reason for this “drawing”, for the close attention and interest that had been centred upon this one girl out of all others since her entrance into

the school. I was soon to know that reason, and in a startling fashion!

Although I was not unused to going about in my astral body, it still seemed odd to me that I could drift through bushes and branches like a wisp of smoke, while Pennoyer in his physical body had to stumble and grope his way along, and strung up as I was, I was hard put to it not to giggle, as fumbling in the dark, Pennoyer climbed the wall and felt his way cautiously up through the thick-grown shrubberies to a position opposite the fountain, as close as he could get to the house—within, say, twenty feet of the end of the loggia.

Here he ensconced himself behind a thick patch of laurustinus and bade me brusquely stand apart while he busied himself with his bundle—not even I must be allowed to see those matters he had brought with him.

I posted myself a little way off, under a linden tree, knowing that I was invisible unless the Father concentrated upon me, which was unlikely, as his attention was and would be entirely concentrated upon Pennoyer, whom he rightly feared . . . and from my position I surveyed the scene before me with interest. Preparations for some sort of rite or ceremony were going on apace, that was plain! There were faint lights and movements going on within the house, there were tiny blue lamps set at intervals along the kerb of the fountain, and upon the marble *pavé* between the fountain and the house, set full in the silver flood-lighting from the rising moon, had been placed a curious thing—a boat-shaped couch of silver or some similar shining white metal, with a coverlet of white ermine carefully spread upon it. Another blue light hung from the upcurving head of the couch and yet another from the foot, and upon the soft fur lay scattered green leaves, and I remembered the handful of scented “Diktamnus”, the herb that brings sleep—and influences childbirth. And my bewilderment and alarm grew sharper. . . .

But there was no time to wonder or analyse, for as I stared there came from the house the thin scree of pipes, mingled with a queer hissing, rattling sound that sent a curious shiver down my back . . . and out into the moonlight, walking towards the fountain, came a fantastic string of figures!

First walked the woman known as Sister Céline. Gone were the nunlike draperies of innocent white that had so impressed Mrs. Hastie and Lady Fenwyck and their cronies! She was clad in a long blue robe—the rich twilight blue of the evening sky;

it was belted with a girdle of moonstones, alternating with huge "blister" pearls; the Evil Sign, the Moon within the inverted Triangle, in similar jewels, swung upon her breast, and on her head was a queer turreted silver head-dress, ringed again with pearls and moonstones—the ceremonial robes and headgear, Penoyer afterwards told me, of the High Priestess of Nekromis. In her hand she held a silver instrument shaped like the Egyptian Ankh—and I knew whence had come that queer rattling sound accompanying the pipes that had made me shiver. Of course—the Sistrum! I should have known it, that strange instrument that had shrilled its serpent-like notes at ceremonies both holy and unholy all day down the ages, from Atlantis down to the present day. . . .

She was followed first by her sister-priestesses, Melitta, Luna, Artemis, Cyrene, each bearing a different instrument, pipes, triangle, flute and cymbals; they were clad in blue too, and on their heads they wore plain silver fillets with the Sign set over their foreheads—and marching behind them came a long double file of young girls.

Twenty in all, twice ten they came, barefoot and clad in white as became their years and innocence, with their long hair flowing, treading steadily, evenly, singing as they came, that same strange ululating sound, half-chant, half-cry, that I had heard before in the garden. They were followed by another, but a single, file, of ten more young girls, moving one behind another like automats, one hand of each linked to a hand of the girl before her, the other hand linked to that of the girl behind. They all came with that same curious ritual dance-movement that I had seen rehearsed, surging forward a few steps, recoiling one step and then surging forward again—and as they came I saw that their eyes were fixed. They were either sleepwalking or (as I found later) hypnotized! And bringing up the rear came three of the five male teachers, the Brothers of the Secret Cult, who had so successfully disguised themselves as schoolmasters. A fair German, spectacled, his hair cut *en brosse*, a bearded Frenchman, and another whose nationality I could not place. All three were in long black robes, belted with male sapphires, the Sign in silver shining on their breasts—and in their hands also they bore instruments, ancient and strange. A tabor, a cittern and a long and sinister-shaped drum. . . .

Three times the fantastic procession circled the fountain and the couch—they gave the latter, I noticed, a wide clearance as

though it were something sacred—and as they came they chanted, but mercifully that terrible thin chanting had not the effect upon my etheric body that it had had on my physical. I knew as I heard it that they were using the Forbidden Chords that set up vibrations that, listened to for long, would mean disintegration of the innermost core of one's being . . . but though my soul shrank and shivered, it remained unaffected.

Three times they circled the fountain, then the three men and the four lesser sisters fell back to the outermost edge of the marble *pavé*, where they stood motionless while the girls ranged themselves in a semicircle on the further side of the fountain. Those that had walked in single file in the front, the others behind them, and in the midst of them the woman called Sister Céline.

There they all stood, rigid as statues, their hands raised palm upwards to Heaven, in dead silence for a moment—and out from the house came the group for whom they all waited! The High Priest, his chief satellites, and his victim—Father Aloysius, the two missing Brothers, and the girl Mona Hastie.

She was as naked as the day she was born but for a huge Sign carved in luminous mother-of-pearl that hung between her young breasts and the fillet of silver centred with a curved mother-of-pearl Crescent that crowned her streaming hair! Her eyes were closed, and she walked like a creature walking in a dream—which indeed she was—and behind her, his hands, from which the evil force that was guiding and controlling her was streaming, held palm forwards, came the Being that I knew as "Father Aloysius".

In the moonlight he seemed gigantic in size, towering above the grouped figures around the fountain in his robes and mantle of purple, dark as the night-clouds, embossed with silver-and-blue metallic embroidery in strange symbolic designs, with a tall, mitre-like head-dress rising high upon his head, of silver so thickly set with precious stones that it glistened as though frosted in the moonlight, and centred with a giant sapphire, the largest I had ever seen! His mantle was clasped with a jewelled clasp as big as a saucer, he was belted and shod with jewels, and the great cross swung from his breast—though now it was reversed—so that as he walked he shone and glittered, a fantastic, amazing figure in the moonlight and the shifting glimmer of the little blue lamps, while behind him marched steadily, side by side, the other two Brothers, robed like the others in black, and swinging censers from which a thick and stifling

perfumed smoke arose that eddied and spread itself abroad in the moonlight in lean serpentine wreaths. I knew that evil perfume! It seemed to tap a chord of sinister recollection deep down in my racial memory, and I shivered and was thankful for the wisdom of Pennoyer that had forbidden me to approach this ordeal in my physical flesh. . . .

Steadily, silently, while the grouped figures about the fountain bowed down before her, the girl came to the side of the silver couch and laid herself down upon it, composing her limbs until they lay straight and stiff as those of a mummy. The High Priest, escorted by his two satellites, passed to the far side of the couch, standing between it and the fountain, the woman known as Sister Céline joined them, and now the incredible hooning music rose again upon the air, and the voices of the assembled worshippers rose with it, shrill, ecstatic, as the Rite began! There was a savage, furious triumph in the chorus that rose to the watching moon as slowly, ceremoniously, the Priest took the censers, first from one assistant, then from the other, and censed the couch, five times across, and five times from head to foot and back again.

Then, muttering words I could not hear, he took a glass vial of oil from the woman Selene and anointed the forehead of the sleeping girl, her breasts, her knees, the palms of her hands, the soles of her feet and finally her navel, while the weird and terrifying music wailed and shrilled about him—then suddenly it fell silent, and he spoke into the silence. The words came clearly to me.

"We greet thee, Holy Victim, the Virgin, blest and honoured, chosen by our Lady of Darkness for service and for sacrifice! Here I, her chosen Priest, anoint thee the Ten Sacred Times in the Ten Sacred Places, and with that anointing, by Her and through Her, I Her priest gain complete and absolute power over thee and whatsoever shall be born of thee, through this most ancient Rite! I anoint thy forehead, that thy mind shall be mine alone to guide and control. I anoint thy breasts that they shall never give suck to earthborn child, but only to That which shall be brought into being through the Rite. I anoint thy knees that they may kneel only to me and the masters I serve, and thy feet that they shall walk only in the path that I shall direct, and thy hands that they shall serve only as I shall order them. And lastly I anoint thy navel, beneath which shall centre and take form no earthly child, but only That Which I have invoked, to rule the

Earth in the Name of the Black Goddess whom we are proud to obey! ”

He paused, and in the pause the Sistrum suddenly shrilled its rattlesnake note—with its sound came the crash of that unspeakable music again, and as it came, the man who called himself Father Aloysius flung his arms upwards and called thunderously, imperiously, on Her Whom he worshipped, Hecate, the Hidden One, the Goddess of the Dark Side of the Moon! As he roared out the unholy invocation the Words of Bale came clearly to my shuddering ear.

“Hail, Ievo—Ievo! All hail, Arka-Melinöe, Virgin Mother of the Heavens, Sovereign Goddess, Lady of the Nether Abyss, Mother of Gods, Moon-born Nekromis! All Hail! Here is the chosen Vessel that shall be impregnated by Thy Will and by the force of Thy most Ancient Rite, so that in due time shall be born of Her, Him who will destroy the World and all that is within it! The Oath is sworn, the Vessel waits, the Future is our Own, when Thy Chosen shall descend and dwell amongst us! In the name of the Dark Ones, in Thy name, O Mother Nekromis, let him descend! *Alm! Alm! Alm!*”

With a sound like the resounding crash of waves upon a pebbled beach, the final triple call was roared forth with all the force of the gathered voices of the group, and as it thundered, echoing through the silent garden, I stared and stared . . . for lo, over the prostrate figure of the girl on the couch, it seemed to me *Something* was hovering! Something so intangible that I doubt whether I would ever have seen it with my physical eyes . . . but the eyes of my etheric body were sharper, and I knew I was not mistaken.

The silver couch had been placed in such a position that the light of the Moon fell full upon it, and in the midst of the clear white flood there seemed now, just above the couch, to be a curious shimmering disturbance in the air, as though a thin vapour was rising in a spiral from the body of the unconscious girl. It looked something like a wisp of steam rising from a boiling kettle—or like the early, misty stages of ectoplasm as it issues from the body of a medium—and a little way above the body the thin wisp expanded into a sort of cloud, and in the hovering cloud I saw, faintly outlined, just taking shape, a Face . . . and my whole soul rose in violent revolt!

I am thankful to this day that my psychic sight was not sufficiently strong to obtain a clearer view of the Entity that was being

drawn down, swiftly, surely, by the force of the vile Evocation that had just been uttered, towards the innocent body of the hypnotized girl . . . what I *did* see in that mere shadowy glimpse was more than enough to give me nightmares for weeks afterwards! I quailed and sickened, feeling the delicate vibrations of my etheric body stir and shudder as smoke is disturbed by a passing wind . . . and then, It happened! Suddenly a Light shone—and Pennoyer was there, standing on the near side of the couch, facing the Black Magician!

Now from this moment onwards my memory is a little shaken and confused, and moreover, the blinding glory in which my friend seemed to stand made it impossible to note details—but I remember that he *shone* from head to foot, from the spreading halo-like rays that blazed about his head to the long robes that flowed like golden water about him—and lo, beside and around him were Those which it is given to few to see, Those before Whom Evil cannot live! I had never seen or heard of Them, but some inner flash of knowledge told me instantly who and what They were. Those whom old Eustathius describes as looking like “cloven tongues as of fire” . . . the Agnishvatta, the Seven Kumaris, the Sons of Fire! Those who are known as the Solar Pitris. . . .

Like immense clear-burning flames They soared about him, one flaring upwards, six foot high and more above his head, three ranged on each side, dazzling, immense, ablaze with the white-hot brilliance that is Purity itself, Light, Fohat, the Eternal Flame—that God-Force before which Darkness and Evil must needs flee away, vanquished, into the darkness where they belong! I knew as I stared that not even my etheric sight could bear more than a flashing glimpse of this glory that was indeed of the gods—but in that single glimpse, all was past and over!

I saw the Magician, his face transfixed with rage and terror, his mouth open to yell, fling up his arms and fall flat on his face, blackened and seared by the light of the Force that had come to vanquish him! I saw his two male companions collapse, blasted as though struck by lightning, and the woman Selene with them. I heard a confused and frightful hubbub of shrieks and sobbings and curses, and then a sound like a terrible clap of thunder . . . and I lost consciousness!

When I came to myself I was back in my room, and Pennoyer, dressed in his ordinary clothes again, was rubbing my hands.

"It's all right," he said . . . and I saw that though he looked white and deadly tired and there were black circles beneath his eyes, his expression was serenely triumphant. "*We*—not I—won the battle! Mona is back safely and sleeping blissfully, without the smallest idea that she has ever left her bedroom! "

I stared at him.

"My God—how? Oh damn! *Why* did I pass out? I wanted to see it through to the end! "

"I was afraid you'd be knocked out when They came," said Pennoyer. "Even with your training you couldn't stand more than a passing glimpse of Them—their vibrations are too high and too pure for poor humanity to bear unveiled. If *you* passed out, you can imagine what happened to that nest of evil-doers! All the ringleaders of what poor Hastie called the 'Holy Circus' were, quite simply, blasted . . . scorched, shrivelled, swept out of existence when the Sons of Fire swept over them and struck the house. That was the clap of thunder you heard—a sudden summer storm, the locals will say, and remind each other that 'Bramerside' had never had a lightning rod! Come here! "

He led me to the window and pulled aside the curtains, and I started, for over against the sky, beyond the dark rampart of tree-tops that was the little wood, a glare of light stained the night-sky scarlet . . . "The Sanctuary" was burning! All the evil that had been done and planned there was going up in clean red flame and smoke. . . .

"The house was struck," said Pennoyer, "directly over the Inner Shrine, the room where Mona was first put under control, and where the Father and his satellites used to do most of their unholy work. I gather that only five were really allowed to know just what was being planned. The Leader, who called himself Aloysius, this woman Sister Céline, Kraa and the two Brothers, the Assistant Priests who swung the censers. These were all killed—struck dead—at the same moment as the Leader."

"But I don't know even yet just *what* was being planned," I protested.

"They were performing," said Pennoyer, "one of the oldest and most terrible ceremonies in the whole range of Black Magic—the Ceremony of the Ritual Birth. If that Rite had gone through to its end—which, thank God and my Helpers, it did *not*!—nothing in the world could have stopped that unfortunate girl from giving birth, in nine months' time, to a Power that, given the cloak of human flesh, might and *would* have ruled the world

for the Dark Forces who were calling him down into incarnation via her wretched body! *She* would have died, of course, in that birthing, or shortly afterwards . . . but that wouldn't have mattered a jot to Aloysius and Company. His name isn't Aloysius, incidentally . . . but I'm not going to mention his real name. It's better you shouldn't know it."

"You don't mean," I began, "that Aloysius . . ."

"Good Lord, no!" said Pennoyer. "There's nothing physical about this kind of conception! The physical shell that would have formed within Mona's body for the use of the cloudy Horror that you saw forming above her, would not have been engendered and built up as normal bodies are built up. In a Ritual Birth the body-to-be is built up in the womb of the chosen Mother, by the use of certain forbidden ceremonies, out of ectoplasm, much as the bodies of spirits manifesting in materialization-circles are built up. You may argue that these temporary bodies don't last and aren't solid—yet the famous 'Katie King's' body felt as solid as a normal body; and when Christ's body of ectoplasm had 'solidified' after His resurrection, He allowed St. Thomas to touch Him and prove His reality. And *He* lived and operated in this 'built-up' body for some time after His physical body's death. Given full knowledge of magic, Black or White, there is no earthly reason why an artificially-created body should not last as long as its User wishes—and in fact does so."

"How did they happen to pick on Mona?" I asked.

"The Black Powers—like the White—are for ever looking out for good instruments," said Pennoyer. "Mona, born under lunar influence, the sensitive daughter of a sensitive, was just perfect for their ends! I've no doubt that when Miriam died they kept a watch on her child, Mona—and indeed, I think that 'Bramerside' was taken and the whole Group brought here specially to trap her. You see, this vile Rite can only be performed with the consent of the Victim, a virgin girl who is a 'sensitive' and who was born on either June 21st or July 22nd, under the influence of Cancer, the Moon-Sign. And to find a subject who combines all these things and is sufficiently 'suggestible' to be brought under control by the Magician training her, is very rare. The Black Brethren must have been constantly on the watch for possible subjects—and I've reason to believe that three other girls at least have been sacrificed during the last ten years in an endeavour to bring about this unholy business! This 'Sanctuary' has been going for some time, under one name or another,

in various countries—its last resting-place was Sicily, I understand, and they had to get out rather quickly. The authorities were not satisfied regarding the mysterious death of one of the Father's girl-pupils, so he found it wise to leave and come to England."

"Does this Ritual Birth business follow the lines of normal birth?" I asked.

"In everything but in the actual physical conception," said Pennoyer. "In the nine months of waiting, this magically-created Body would have gradually 'crystallized' until it was strong enough to stand the light of day—and then it would have been born as other babies are born, and immediately been taken possession of by the Entity for whom it had been created."

"But what sort of Entity would that be?" I asked.

"Precisely from what level of the Other World *this* particular one came, I don't know," said Pennoyer. "But it was—as they always are—a Being from a Cycle of Evolution entirely non-human, that should never, and normally *does* never, contact human evolution at all! To bring such a creature into being here on earth, to live and move as a man amongst men, is a monstrous and dreadful sin—though it was done fairly frequently in the last decadent days of Atlantis by the Priests of the Black Temples, when they wanted to create strong and ruthless slaves for their service."

"But what were they planning to do via this Entity, if they'd brought him into being here?" I asked.

"They were hoping—as they are always hoping," said Pennoyer, "to conquer and dominate the entire Earth, give it over to the Black Forces! This Being would have been a perfect instrument in their hands. Never having belonged to humanity, it would have had absolutely no conception of such human emotions as love or honour or loyalty, kindness, tenderness, self-sacrifice . . . how should it? These things would have been utterly outside its ken! You would have had a Being without a soul—a Thing walking the world in man's shape who was utterly ruthless, utterly cold and cruel, but brilliant, powerful and magnetic to a degree beyond any human comprehension! A Being that could have drawn the weak, the evil, the ambitious, all, to follow him, no matter where he led—a Frankenstein directed by the Black Brotherhood for the destruction of mankind! In a word, a super-Hitler."

"Was Hitler brought into the world this way?" I asked.

"Oh no," said Pennoyer. "Hitler was bad enough, but he was still, however bestial and corrupt, a *human* creature . . . *this* wouldn't be human at all, and might live God knows how long! You see, it is the stress and strain of human emotions, sorrows, sufferings, loves, sins, that wears the body out. This Being, not belonging to the human world at all, not even occupying a normal human body, would know no human reactions and so might live almost indefinitely . . . brrh, it doesn't bear thinking of! Thank God, it was balked of its destiny and sent back to wherever it belongs, and the world is safe once more."

I shivered.

"Don't let's think about it any more," I said. "But tell me. You said the ringleaders were instantly blasted by the Holy Fire—what happened to all the others?"

"Oh, the girls merely crumpled into unconsciousness where they stood," said Pennoyer. "And as the instant Aloysius collapsed, his power passed to me, I let them remain unconscious, like Mona, until things had been tidied up a bit! The native servants came rushing out of the blazing house squealing with fear, and the other men and women threw themselves grovelling at my feet, weeping and shrieking and promising amendment. I knew that several of these had been more or less mere tools in that devil's hands, and really didn't know the true inwardness of what they were engaged on, so to these I said that they would be given a fresh chance if they swore a solemn oath to me—and to Those I represent—never to reveal what had happened and never to dabble in forbidden things again. They accepted my conditions—which I know they are too terrified to break—and I then gave them my orders, and told them that if they carried them out to the letter they could go their ways in freedom whither they would. But three—the German and the Frenchman and the woman they called Sister Melitta—they were in it deeper than the rest, and I could not be so lenient. So I sent them, under guard—and don't ask me Who came to guard them, as I'm not going to tell you!—to a certain House of Penitence, where I hope, under very strict guidance and surveillance, they may in time expiate their evil-doing and be granted a fresh start."

"But," I said, "you haven't told me . . ."

"I know," said Pennoyer, "about Mona. Well, when that was done I made the three remaining women dress Mona so that she could come back—still hypnotized, of course—through the wood with me, and I promised them that when she was safely

in bed and sleeping I would not only mentally release all the other girls from their state of hypnotism, but expunge from their minds all memory of the unholy rites they had been taught. By that time the house would be burning briskly, and they could tell the girls they had been awakened and brought out on to the lawn half-asleep or dazed by the smoke, or any other story they liked—and on the morrow they could be packed off to their various homes, and the 'teachers' could go their ways. 'The Sanctuary' would be a thing of the past. The house would be nothing but a shell. Calcined . . . but clean."

"What of Mona's future?" I said. "Can she escape all the consequences of the past six months?"

Pennoyer shook his head.

"Well no—not entirely," he said. "The effect of this unholy Rite will mean that she will never have a child—you see, there's no getting away from the fact that for months she has been trained, fed and treated as a Moon priestess, and Moon priestesses are always sterile. They sacrifice their fertility to the Goddess and so remain ever-virgin. Also . . . that devil's spells were potent, and you will remember that he anointed her breasts and her body 'that no child of earth should be born thereof'. I doubt if she'll marry, even. But on the other hand, the intensive training she has undergone has increased her psychic powers enormously, and those enlarged powers remain, though she has totally forgotten the unholy knowledge that enlarged them. Since I was the humble instrument of saving her, she has now passed into my hands, and I intend to guide her towards her ultimate destiny—that destiny that should have been her mother's, but which she turned down for love of Ran. But now . . . the gods will not deny me twice!"

His voice rang out, firm, confident, and he stared out towards the red light in the sky, now sunk to a sullen glow, with a flame of triumph in his eyes.

"I shall ask Ran to let her come to me for training, and he will not refuse me—for I shall tell him, in my own good time, the truth of this night's work. Mona will be a medium—and one of the greatest the world has ever known! Thousands will come to follow the Light of Truth through her. So the weapon that the Black Brotherhood forged for their own ends will be turned against them—and truly, once again it is proved that 'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform'."

6

THE CASE OF THE YOUNG MAN
WITH THE SCAR

THIS HAPPENED ONE SUNNY SUMMER in London, when I was playing secretary for a time to Pennoyer in the absence, owing to illness, of his secretary, Miss Lorne—and not sorry, I might admit, for the unique opportunity it gave me for an insight into his cases and his methods of treating them.

It was after six o'clock, and the list of appointments for the day all dealt with—or so I thought—when a ring came on the front door of the flat, and after a moment or two old Friedl came into the room with a note in one hand and a portentous look in her eye.

Pennoyer made a face—he was tired. And I swore, for I knew Friedl had been cooking (for my special benefit!) roast duckling with herb stuffing, to be accompanied by sliced ham and white cabbage salad, with one of her divine *apfelstrudels* and whipped cream to follow—and I had no desire to keep such a dinner waiting, no matter how serious the case.

Pennoyer scanned the lines of the short note and threw it over to me. It was very short and written on a sheet of paper with a small gilt coronet in the upper left-hand corner. It began:

“DEAR PENNOYER,

“You will remember our pleasant, if all too rare—for me, at least!—meetings at certain gatherings, and it is on this comparatively slight acquaintance that I venture to send this letter of introduction in the hope that you may find time to see the bearer, George Kynaston. He is a nice youngster, though frankly, rather a puzzle to me in a good many ways—and a great friend of my little girl's. It is, indeed, largely on her account that I have advised him to consult you on the matter that is troubling him.

“Frankly, I feel that before this friendship between him and my girl can develop into anything more serious, the said trouble should be cleared up, if possible—and it is greatly to the boy's credit that he feels as I do.

“If you can spare the time to see him and tell me your conclusions I shall be eternally obliged.

“Yours sincerely,

“ENDEAN.”

Viscount Endean of Knaresby Hall, Berkshire; of Park Lane; of "Lantingtowers", Cumberland; of "Macrahanish", Ross-shire. . . .

I glanced at Pennoyer with a grin.

"Moving in high circles, aren't you?" I commented. "What contact have you got with one of the old-style landed gents?"

"Common interests, shall we say?" rejoined Pennoyer with a faint smile. "He happens to be a member of a certain Occult Fraternity to which I belong, and we've met at their meetings. He is very deeply learned in occult matters, though he is studying along lines quite different from my own. A charming old man." He studied the letter again. "Yes, I think we will see this young man—even at the cost of spoiling your duck!"

He nodded to Friedl, while I suppressed a not unreasonable feeling of annoyance—we had had a long day and nothing but vegetables for lunch, and I was hungry. But there was no help for it—Friedl disappeared, and within a few moments a tall, black-haired young man was ushered into the room.

He stood still a moment, blinking in the flood of slanting sunlight that was still pouring in at the open window—for it was late in June, and the evenings long and lovely—and then came forward with a rather engaging air of diffidence and held out his hand.

"It's very good of you to see me so immediately, doctor," he said. "I had scarcely hoped . . . I mean, I thought you would be so busy. . . ."

Pennoyer smiled and waved him towards a chair.

"It luckily happened that I had got through my work and was free," he said easily, "and I shall be delighted to do anything I can for any friend of Lord Endean's." He nodded to me, teetering in the background wondering whether to go or stay—and of course itching to stay! "This is my friend and temporary secretary, Mr. Latimer, before whom you can speak quite freely."

I eyed the newcomer curiously as he took the indicated chair. He was a fine-looking young fellow, about six foot three, with a pair of splendid shoulders, skin either deeply sunburnt or naturally so brown as to look so, strong square hands and long muscular legs—a first-class athlete, one would have said, and with something so essentially outdoor about him that his exquisitely-cut Savile Row summer suiting of palest grey, worn with a silk shirt to match, a mauve-and-silver-striped tie and pale

grey suède shoes, struck an oddly false note. As odd as the jade cuff-links that showed as he sat down, as the silk socks, as the gold-and-platinum cigarette-case with the diamond initial which he pulled out and offered to us with a rather engaging air of diffidence that clashed oddly with his sophisticated man-about-town air. But Pennoyer shook his head smilingly and I followed suit, and the ornate case vanished into its owner's pocket once more. The boy—for he was little more—looked from one to the other of us and smiled awkwardly, and I saw that his eyes were—rather surprisingly—blue, in sharp contrast to his rich black hair and brown skin.

"I'm afraid you'll think me an awful fool," he blurted. "I—er—really don't know how to begin, and I'm afraid it will sound most frightful rubbish. . . ."

"I'm used to hearing what's called rubbish," said Pennoyer gently. "Just tell me what's worrying you—and who suggested you should come to see me about it?"

"Oh," said the young Kynaston at once. "Dolly Endean—that is, Lord Endean's daughter. She—we're great friends." He flushed ingenuously and I saw that he was younger than I had supposed—probably under rather than over twenty-one. His fine build and well-marked features at first gave the impression that he was somewhat older. "We dance and go about a lot together, and I go down to stay with them sometimes, and I told her about it . . . how I'd been to all sorts of doctors and specialists and whatnot all over the world almost, since it started. And she talked to her father, and he sent me along to you."

"Well," said Pennoyer with a smile, "what about letting me hear what 'it' is?"

"I haven't any idea," said the young man a shade grimly, "and neither have any of the doctors, as far as I can see. All I can do is to show it to you—and see what you think."

He stood up and flung off his elegant grey jacket, rolled up the right sleeve of his soft silk shirt, and thrust out a brawny young arm, brown and healthy and sprinkled with a fine covering of soft dark hairs. The sunlight fell direct upon it, and showed, winding round the forearm, from above the wristbone to just below the inner curve of the elbow, a most curious scar! A fine red line precisely like the line left by a whip-lash . . . or like a dull red snake curling round the arm. Both Pennoyer and I uttered an exclamation of interested surprise, and Pennoyer, taking the young man's wrist in one hand, ran his long sensitive

fingers up the scar and down again. I could see that it seemed to be raised a trifle from the level of the surrounding skin, as a weal is raised, and that one end, the end nearest the elbow, terminated in a flat round blob very much like the head of a snake. . . .

"This," said Pennoyer, "is remarkably interesting. Tell me about it—at least, I mean as much as you know."

"That's precious little!" said young Kynaston bluntly. "All I can tell you is that this confounded thing started, I should think, about five or six years ago . . . when I was about fifteen and at school. At first they thought I'd got some queer disease and isolated me, and talked of sending me away when the doctors couldn't make out what it was. But then it faded, and for a while things were all right . . . until it turned up again and I had to leave. I've had to leave I don't know how many schools because of the damn thing. . . ."

"Oh," said Pennoyer, "then it's periodic—I mean, you don't always have it?"

"Oh no!" said the boy. "It comes and goes, but apparently without any sort of rhyme or reason, and it lasts—oh, sometimes only a day or two, sometimes over a week! When it first started it only came once or twice a year, but the—the periodicity gradually increased, until this last year, when it blazed up four times, and each time lasted ever so much longer than usual." He eyed his arm gloomily. "This has been on now a week, and doesn't look like going yet, and I'm worried sick!" He paused a moment, reddened and then went on with a rush. "Oh well, hang it, I'd better be honest! Dolly and I . . . well, we want to get married, and though we're both pretty young, I suppose, I feel sure the old man—I mean Lord Endean—would O.K. it like a shot, if only I could get this infernal business cleared up. But not until it *is* cleared up. He as good as told me so—and of course he's right. Obviously it wouldn't be fair to . . . to our children"—he flushed more deeply than ever, and I decided I liked him even more than I had thought—"to get married, with this mysterious something-or-other in my blood. If it's something like that awful thing that makes one bleed to death . . ."

"Haemophilia?" said Pennoyer. "Oh, I don't think it's anything in the least like that, though I can't yet tell you *what* it is." His fingers were gently caressing the curious scar as he spoke. "Anything ever happened to cause it, do you know—

"I mean an accident or anything like that—and does it hurt at all?"

The boy shook his head.

"Not a thing—and it doesn't hurt. I know when it's coming, because before the scar actually comes out I get a slight throbbing and a sort of hot feeling along the place where it always appears—it aches and burns a little, but never very much." He eyed my friend anxiously. "You know, sir, you're my . . . *our* last hope! I've tried—that is, Francine has tried, she's my mother, I've always called her that—every conceivable sort of doctor and specialist, without any result! And I thought . . . I hoped . . . Lord Endean told me that you were different from most doctors. . . ." His troubled eyes searched my friend's face anxiously. "I thought perhaps . . ."

"People do generally come to me as a last hope!" agreed Pennoyer dryly as he relinquished his hold of his new patient's wrist. "However, I shall be delighted to see if I can do anything to help you."

The words were conventional, but I knew Pennoyer well enough to know by the gleam in his eye that accompanied them, that he was already off on the scent, like a trained dog after his prey. He drew a pad of paper and a pencil towards him and went on in business-like tones.

"Now I'd like you to tell me all you possibly can about yourself, no matter how apparently trivial or irrelevant. I shall know better than you how to sort out the wheat from the chaff! First of all, where were you born?"

Young Kynaston complied willingly enough, but the story he revealed, while romantic enough in a sense, did not seem to show anything at all unusual—and certainly nothing to explain the strange red scar. I studied it furtively as he talked, for he had not replaced his coat, and once I ventured to lay my hand upon it . . . he flashed a quick smile at me as I touched him and went on talking as I fingered the sinister-looking mark. It was, as I thought, slightly raised above the level of the surrounding skin, and felt heated to the touch, as though slightly fevered—I also thought that I detected a faint throbbing along it. But this may have been imagination on my part, as a fevered vein—which it so strongly resembled—would naturally throb. . . .

As I studied the scar with one-half of my attention, the other half was listening to the story of our new patient's life. He was, he said, of British blood, but born in Canada. His father seems

to have been a wandering sort of a fellow possessed of sufficient money to enable him to follow his own whims, who, after an adventurous sort of life, had settled in Canada, married a Canadian bride—young Kynaston's mother "Francine"—and proceeded to invest his money in land. He had either been shrewd or lucky, or perhaps both, for his investments had paid well, and when he died, at the early age of thirty-eight, in an accident when he was out riding, his widow and little son were left more than adequately provided for . . . they were, in fact, exceedingly well off, as the expensive quality of the young man's suit, shoes and etceteras proved beyond any doubt! Mrs. Kynaston had wished, on being left a widow, to sell her husband's property in Canada—which was pretty extensive, I gathered, but according to the terms of Paul Kynaston's will, she could not do so. She was left handsomely "found" as the saying is, but the property was left to young George Kynaston, then a mere child of seven or eight only—and he could, if he wished, sell it when he reached the age of twenty-one. Until then it was to be carefully maintained and looked after, so that the boy should take over his inheritance in perfect order—but apparently this was a job by no means to Mrs. Kynaston's taste! So she placed a responsible agent in charge, shook the dust of Canada from her heels, and went off with her child, first to New York and then further and further afield. Indeed, thereafter life seemed to have consisted of more or less constant travel for the lady, plus a string of different schools and colleges for the boy, first in this country, then in that, until the constant recurrence of this curious scar was the cause of so many dismissals that school was given up as a bad job, and gave place to a succession of crammers, tutors and so on. During the last three years mother and son had apparently been living in London at a very smart house in Culross Street, giving and going to parties and generally leading the life of the "idle rich". . . .

"Have you never been back to Canada?" asked Pennoyer, abruptly interrupting.

The boy looked at him in surprise.

"Why, no!" he said. "Why should I want to go to Canada?"

There was a pause. I didn't know why at the time, but I felt a queer little shock of surprise at his answer, and after a moment Pennoyer rejoined casually:

"Well, you were born there and lived there until you were eight or nine years old, you tell me? You must have known

Canadian life—gone hunting, shooting, fishing, tramping, climbing and so on with your father before he died. I imagine it's the sort of life that generally sticks in a boy's memory. Life in the wilds, seeing the Great Wide-open Spaces and all that. . . ."

He was watching our new patient's face closely as he spoke, and I felt a thrill of excitement. Already he was on the chase after some clue . . . but there seemed no sort of response in the boy's blank face as he listened, and shook his head.

"Oh no! Really, I don't remember much about it at all—I don't seem to remember anything very clearly about my childhood, I'm afraid. My mother told me I had a whack on the head—fell out of a tree while climbing—when I was about seven, and it's affected my memory of my childhood. Anyway, I've got no sort of yen for Canada or for country life at all—quite the contrary. I like civilization! London, Paris, New York, that sort of thing—dancing, shows, racing, a spot of gambling . . . there's nothing of the hearty outdoor pioneer about *me*!"

"Odd!" said Pennoyer, watching him as he spoke. "Now to look at you I'd have said you were a first-class outdoor sort of fellow—good at swimming and riding, boxing, tennis and so on. Don't you go in for sports at all?"

A faint cloud passed across the boy's open, ingenuous countenance.

"Well, it may sound rather funny," he said reluctantly, "but though I don't want to swank, and I don't care much about sports, when I do 'em I'm really pretty good! Specially riding and shooting and managing a boat—and though I'd never tried my hand at fishing, Lord Endean took me out with him one day to a reach on the river where he often goes, and he said he couldn't believe I'd never handled a rod before. I took to it like a duck to water!" He flushed. "That sounds confoundedly conceited, I know, but it's true . . . and while I was fishing with him I really enjoyed it. It felt sort of familiar to me—queer! I was surprised. . . ."

"Then now and again you *do* find yourself taking an interest in a life quite different from the town-and-social round that I gather you lead as a rule?" commented Pennoyer.

Again that faint puzzled cloud flitted over the young man's face and he paused a moment before replying.

"Well—yes—but only now and then! When I'm with D—the Endeans—I *do* seem to take to it all right. But directly I get back to London I realize I was really awfully bored all the

time . . . which is very odd, when you come to think of it, isn't it?" His open brow was creased by a wondering frown, but Pennoyer spoke quickly.

"I shouldn't bother your head about that," he said, "it's not very important" . . . but even as he said it I knew that somehow it was of the very greatest importance!

The boy laughed.

"It would be important if I took a real craze for country life!" he said. "Francine would go nearly crackers! She's all for the bright lights and the gay life—travel, good times, entertainments and all that sort of thing—and I can't imagine what she'd do if I proposed to bury myself in some country place or other! Not that it is likely to happen! Though I admit that when I'm with the Endeans I *do* find myself liking all sorts of things that, ordinarily speaking, bore me to death. I guess it's because I—er—like them both, and like doing the things they do because it pleases 'em. But if I were left to myself I would never set foot in the country. It bores me stiff."

Although it was obvious that the boy was speaking with complete honesty, again that curious sense of incongruity nudged me—there was something false somewhere! Here was this splendid specimen of manhood—husky, tough, the ideal sort of fellow, one would have said, to go out and occupy a new country, break it and mould it to his will, marry and sire sons and daughters as fine and hearty as himself—here was the pioneer positively denying his own destiny! Or so it seemed, as he sat there with one leg crossed over the other, one suède-shod foot dangling, the light striking green gleams from the jade links in his loosened shirt-cuff, his very nails manicured until they shone . . . and it was just then that I first caught it! The scent of pine-needles! Spicy, aromatic, the sort of scent that brings with it memories of the pine-clad heights of the Schwarzwald, of the towering forests of Norway, of the wild north of Canada and the Rockies. . . . I caught my breath and glanced at Pennoyer. For a moment his busy pencil was suspended. He had smelt it too. . . .

He rose and, closing his notepad, held out one hand.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Kynaston! You have given me quite sufficient information to enable me to make a start on your case at least. I shall review what you have told me, and when I have come to some decision, I will get in touch with you again."

The boy rose to his feet at once.

"Thank you very much indeed, sir. I'm very grateful to you for giving me so much of your time, and I shall wait till you get in touch with me. There's only one thing." He paused awkwardly. "Do you mind writing to my Club—the 'Travellers'? You see, I live with my mother, and if she happened to get hold of any idea that I was coming to see a . . ."

"A 'psychic doctor' is the formal term!" said Pennoyer, smiling. "Then she isn't in sympathy with anything to do with what an old friend of mine calls 'spookery'?"

Young Kynaston shook his head ruefully.

"No!" he confessed. "She's very much against it! In fact she gets frightfully worked up if anything to do with—what is it?—psychic stuff is as much as mentioned! She quarrelled with the mother of a great friend of mine because she found out she was a Spiritualist, and it was an awful shock to her when she found out that Lord Endean was interested in that sort of thing." He chuckled, all at once completely boy. "Only by the time she found it out we'd all got too friendly for her to chill off! Besides, Francine's too . . ." He stopped abruptly and changed the subject as he picked up his hat and held out a brown hand. "Good-bye, sir—and thank you again. I hope I haven't kept you too long. . . ." His eyes strayed to the clock as he spoke and his face lengthened. "Seven o'clock! Good Lord, and I promised Francine I'd be home at six-thirty! She *will* be wild . . . I promised to help her cope with the crowd. . . ."

"Cocktail party?" queried Pennoyer as he shook hands.

Young Kynaston nodded.

"Cocktail party! A big one. Full of notables. Francine's a great one for giving parties—I must make a run for it. Good-bye, sir."

The echo of the slam of the front door of the flat had hardly died away before Pennoyer looked at me, and his eyes were bright with speculation.

"An interesting case, I think!" he said with satisfaction. "What do you make of it, Jerry?"

"Well, two things struck me as queer," I began, "though I can't make any deductions from them. . . ."

"We haven't reached that stage yet," interrupted Pennoyer rather snappishly. "I'm collecting impressions only—and *all* impressions are useful, or may be. Go on."

"Well," I said, "first of all, he's somehow—incongruous. Looks like a young Tarzan and is dressed like a sissy . . . doesn't

remember a thing about Canada or his father or anything else, and yet he was eight before he left the country . . . is he lying, or is that story of losing his memory through a fall true, do you suppose?"

"I don't think he's lying—I think he's a perfectly honest youngster," said Pennoyer, "and it is possible to lose one's memory through a fall, of course! His mother told him so, it seems." He brooded. "Anything else?"

"Oh yes," I said. "That smell of pine-needles. With those sissyish clothes I wouldn't be surprised if he'd used bath-salts—but if he had had any scent on him when he came in I swear I'd have smelt it at once. You know I've got a nose like a fox! But I didn't. It suddenly seemed to sweep across the room when you were speaking about Canada. . . ."

Pennoyer nodded.

"Precisely! I saw you'd smelt it too . . . I not only smelt it, but I saw where it came from. There was a tall tree—a pine tree—bending and swaying behind the boy all the time he was talking. It showed itself at first just faintly while we were examining his arm, and then it grew so distinct that I thought possibly you might have seen it too."

"No," I said regretfully, "I only got the scent. How exciting—you're a marvel, Pen! You're on the track already."

"Well, I've got one or two clues," said Pennoyer thoughtfully. "He told me more than I realized. He's an ingenuous sort of a lad, and I'm sure quite straightforward—he's not putting on any act, and yet, as you say, he has two aspects that simply don't square at all. I wonder what his mother's like? I have an idea that the key to a good deal lies with her."

"I have a hunch you won't like her," I said with a grin. "She's obviously a socialite and a snob . . . did you see how he nearly said that 'Francine was too fond of a lord to drop him even if he were spooky'?"

Pennoyer grinned at me.

"I did," he said. "And that's why I'm going to write and suggest that Endean invites the Kynastons down to stay! We'll go down—say in the characters of an antiquarian friend and his secretary—and I can spy out the land at my ease, without the lady suspecting anything! And now let's go and see if dinner's still eatable."

Pennoyer's suggestion was greeted by the old Viscount with

enthusiasm, and a few days later, about seven o'clock on a delightful July evening, we were driving up the long gravel drive of Knaresby Hall.

The old Viscount's favourite home was a stately Georgian pile of mellow brick with finishings of white stone, rows of tall windows all aglitter in the slanting sunlight, two statues of long-dead Endeans set in deep niches each side of the entrance, a double-pillared porch with a carved pediment overhead enshrining the dignified front door. The grounds in which the house was set swept away each side, smooth-cut lawns shaded here and there by groups of great trees that had weathered the storms of three hundred years and more, and massed with thickets of rhododendrons and flowering shrubs; and beyond the grounds proper stretched green fields patterned with daisies and clover and yellow mustard-flower, where groups of plump red and white cattle stood peacefully feeding.

As we climbed out of the car, Endean himself, a lean, stooping, handsome old man, wearing white flannel trousers and a grey alpaca coat, came out of the front door, following the dignified butler, who had hastened out to cope with our baggage, and coming down the steps with a step as light as a boy's, held out his hand with a charming smile of greeting.

"So glad to see you both," he said cordially. "Just in time for cocktails, too! Come and have a drink while Bentley sees that your things are unpacked."

He led the way into a large panelled hall from which a wide oak staircase curved upwards in a graceful sweep to a landing that was lighted by a circular window at the top of the stairs. Various doors opened right and left of the hall, and the Viscount nodded towards them as we walked across it.

"Morning-room right, library left," he said. "The library leads into my study, which opens out on to one end of the terrace. There's a little gunroom and washplace under the stairs, and the small drawing-room, which we generally use ourselves, lies beyond the morning-room and leads on to the other end of the terrace—the main drawing-room has two windows opening on to the terrace, and lies between my study and the little drawing-room. We call it the Yellow Drawing-Room—we're coming to it." He nodded towards a large pair of double doors that we were approaching. "One of those absurdly over-sized rooms that are far too big for these practical days! Dolly and I never use it, except when the house is full of youngsters, as at the moment—

they like it because it's big enough for dancing, playing games and so on."

The room into which he ushered us was certainly a splendid apartment. It ran almost the full length of the back of the house, with two immense French windows opening upon a long paved terrace, from which four or five shallow steps led down to a formal rose-garden, now a blaze of glorious colour; beyond it rose a tall clipped yew hedge, over twenty feet high, with an archway in the middle through which a paved path ran from the rose-garden to the tennis-courts on the further side of the hedge.

I looked round the handsome room with interest. It was beautifully decorated, though like the rest of the house somewhat worn and shabby in places—it was plain that the money necessary to keep the Endean properties in good repair was sadly lacking! The ceiling was painted with cupids flying amidst clouds and garlands of roses, and the walls were hung with yellow damask, still lusciously sunny in colour, though faded in places, and the furniture was for the most part elaborately carved and gilded Empire pieces covered with hand-worked gros-point, still beautiful though sadly worn; there was a gilded grand piano and an ancient harp, beside a modern radio-gramophone, and several carved and painted cabinets crammed with china and curios, while an Indian "Tree of Life" carpet made of silk that must have been worth thousands, despite its threadbare patches, covered the parquet floor. Despite signs of wear and tear it was still a room almost oppressive in its magnificence, and I did not wonder that the Viscount and his daughter spent little time in it when they were by themselves.

Large as the room was, it seemed at first sight to be crammed with people, but as the old Viscount introduced them they began to sort themselves out more or less.

Young George Kynaston—who, needless to say, had been informed of our coming and advised to act as though he had never seen us before—nevertheless blushed as he grinned in answer to our greetings, and I took an instant liking to the girl beside whom he had been standing as we entered—a tall, slender, brown-haired girl sufficiently like old Endean to be immediately recognizable as his daughter. There was a graceful, haggard woman in a deplorably badly-cut dark blue cotton frock—one of those garments that only a woman of the British upper classes can wear with serene indifference as to its dowdiness!—who was as plainly Endean's sister as the girl Dolly was his daughter. "Aunt

Leila" had, I gathered, kept house for her brother since the death of his wife some ten years earlier.

Besides a handful of older people, neighbours who had dropped in to tea, there were about a dozen young people about the age of Dolly and George Kynaston, the boys in flannel slacks and shirts, the girls in the shorts, shirts and ankle-socks that is the accepted modern feminine wear for tennis. Some had merely come in for a game of tennis and were departing homewards after their drinks, but some half-dozen or so were actually staying in the house. I vaguely gathered that two of them were sisters—Ray and Lola Tempest—and there was another girl called Molly, and several young men; a hearty red-faced youngster who rejoiced in the remarkable nickname of "Bugs", for what reason I never discovered; a pair of brothers named Langland, also very young and hearty; another lad called (I think) Frank, and Mollison, a lean, leather-faced K.C. who was, it seemed, a lifelong devotee of "Aunt Leila's". That made up the party, but for Mrs. Kynaston—of whom there was no sign.

We took our share of cocktails, which were excellent—that is, I did, for Pennoyer, as usual, stuck to his "soft" drinks—while we exchanged the usual inanities that pass for conversation among people just introduced to each other. Then the "outside" visitors departed in their various directions, and the members of the house-party wended their way upstairs to change for dinner, while Endean shepherded Pennoyer and myself into his delightful book-lined study on the pretext of showing us a special manuscript of antiquarian interest.

"I'm not going to keep you two more than a minute or two," he said. "But I thought I would seize this chance of having a word with you while Mrs. Kynaston is mercifully engaged in dressing herself for dinner—which is a process that luckily takes a considerable time!"

"I gather you don't care much for young George's mother," said Pennoyer downrightly.

Endean shook his head regretfully.

"I'm afraid I don't!" he said. "And that's one of the reasons why I feel rather worried about the love-affair between these children. I'm not snobbish, I trust, but I'd have liked my girl to marry into a family of whom I knew something . . . and really, I know next to nothing of the Kynastons, except that they are rich and own land in Canada. And if George's father was a gentleman—well, he didn't marry a lady! Still, I'm bound to say

I see nothing of his mother in George, who is a delightful boy, though there are certain contradictory aspects about him that I can't quite understand. For instance, down here he is so essentially a fine outdoor young fellow—and seems so happy leading our country life—that it always gives me a positive shock to meet him in London, at his mother's parties, dressed like the type of young man-about-town that I know he really *isn't*!”

I looked at the old man, interested. Now I knew why suddenly I had felt George Kynaston was much more “right” down here than when we had met him in town! In his open-throated tennis-shirt and rolled-up sleeves—though one, I noticed, was not rolled up but hung loose, he was evidently sensitive about the scar—with loose white flannel slacks belted about his lithe waist with a leather strap, he lacked that faintly over-polished, artificial look he had worn in London. I brought my attention firmly to heel as the old man went on.

“I'm not going to say anything more about Mrs. Kynaston, though—I don't want to colour your conclusions. You will see her at dinner, and you can draw your own impressions then. One thing I *will* say, and that is that she is a very strong personality—you won't be able to ignore her!” He laughed half ruefully. “But I didn't ask you in here to talk about her. This is what I really wanted to say. Young George has taken to sleep-walking!”

We both exclaimed in interest, and he went on:

“Whether it's an old habit I don't know, and I can't ask Mrs. Kynaston for fear of putting her on the *qui vive*—I only discovered it yesterday, and I'm rather worried about it. Of course it *may* have nothing whatever to do with this mysterious scar business—and yet it may!”

“How did you find out about his sleep-walking?” asked Pennoyer with interest.

“My old butler, Bentley, found it out,” said the Viscount. “He was my batman when I was soldiering, and when I left he took service with me. One of his duties is to go round the house and see that the doors are locked and the windows are properly fastened last thing at night; and yesterday morning he came and told me that the night before he had been in the drawing-room—the Yellow Drawing Room, the one we've just come from, I mean—and was just going to close the curtains and draw the shutters, when he heard a sound, turned round and saw young Kynaston coming into the room! He'd changed out of his dinner-jacket

into a tweed jacket and flannel slacks and brogues, and at first Bentley opened his mouth to ask him if there was anything wrong—and then he saw that he was fast asleep! Bentley was so astonished that he stood stock still, and watched the boy walk down the room, across the terrace, down into the rose-garden, and disappear through the arch in the yew hedge!”

We listened with absorbed attention.

“What happened then?” asked Pennoyer.

“Well, Bentley pulled himself together and ran after him, but he’d disappeared by the time Bentley had got to the yew hedge, and Bentley was rather in a quandary. He didn’t know whether to leave the house and go exploring after George, or fetch me, or what! It would really have been waste of time to try and run him to earth, as the grounds get pretty wild beyond the tennis-courts—can’t afford to keep them up—and there are huge shrubberies and clumps of trees and so on all over the place. Once out of sight George might have branched off in any one of a dozen directions—also it was dark, about twelve o’clock, when this happened, and George is a young man and Bentley as old as I am, so pursuit was useless. But Bentley knew a little about sleep-walking—apparently one of his sisters used to ‘walk’ as a child—and he knew that as a rule they return to the place they’ve left; so he got himself a blanket, left the window open, and lay down on a sofa to keep watch. He dozed a bit from time to time—cat-napping, old-soldier style, with one ear cocked for a movement—and about five o’clock, back came Master George, still sound asleep! He went upstairs, took off his things, put on his pyjamas, got into bed and settled down as peacefully as a child—but he left his bedroom door ajar, so Bentley, who had followed him softly, was able to see the whole thing. Bentley tiptoed in a few minutes after he got into bed and brought away his discarded clothes to show to me. I examined them when Bentley brought me his report. The shoes were dirty—he’d obviously tramped a long way—and his jacket and trousers still had bits of grass and twigs and dirt sticking to them—and Bentley told me he’d got leaves in his hair and a smear of earth all down one cheek. He’d been sleeping out of doors—George, who always professes that pioneering’s anathema to him! I *always* felt there was something wrong—something out of tune about his vaunted dislike of country life and things—and yet I swear he’s honest when he says he hates them!”

He looked at Pennoyer.

“What’s your opinion of this point, Pennoyer? It seems to me

that somewhere in the boy there *is* a love of nature and of outdoor life that has been somehow repressed in his *conscious* life, and that maybe this is trying to express itself when that conscious life is temporarily in abeyance—at least that's my impression. What do you think?"

"I think you're probably perfectly right," said my friend approvingly. "And what we have to find is *why* and *how* it has been repressed! But go on with your story."

"Well," said Endean, "I was very much interested, and told Bentley that the next night I'd keep watch with him to see if the same thing happened again. And it *did*—just as he had told me! So if it's all right by you two—dear me, how catching these Yankee phrases are!—I thought we would all three sit up and watch to-night, and if the same thing happens for the third time, follow the boy and see where he goes! It's all very mysterious, and I feel we must clear it up."

"Of course," said Pennoyer. "As you say, it *may* have nothing whatever to do with the scar mystery—and yet it may. We'll sit up with you with pleasure, though if you will forgive my saying so, I think you'll have to leave the 'trailing' of the boy to Latimer and me. It may be a long and tiring job—and I have not forgotten you've got a game leg."

Endean, who was lame from an old war wound, flushed faintly and smiled.

"You're a good fellow, Pennoyer," he said. "I sometimes forget that my spirit is stronger than my body! All right. You two fellows change into old clothes and walking-shoes when you go upstairs with the others, and meet me down here afterwards. We'll take up stations in the Yellow Drawing Room and see what happens. Come along—we shall have to hurry or we shall be late for dinner."

Mrs. Kynaston duly appeared at dinner, and I own that I studied her with frank curiosity and interest.

She was quite unlike her son—the fact that they both possessed black hair seemed the only thing they shared in common! George hadn't an ounce of fat on his big frame, and his well-marked features, long limbs and finely-shaped hands and feet showed race and breeding, while Mrs. Kynaston was of middle height only, and thickly built—indeed, definitely stout. She moved heavily, though not without a certain dignity, her hands and feet were short and square, and her face, while handsome enough

. . . that is, one could see that she must have been handsome before her features had become blurred and thickened with fat . . . certainly bore no resemblance to George's aristocratic type of good looks. Despite a coating of careful make-up, one could see that her skin was darkly sallow, in fact almost olive in colour, and she was most magnificently dressed. Overdressed, in fact, for dinner in a modest English household—it is only in the films that a house-party in an aristocratic English family decks itself out as though attending a Court!

Mrs. Kynaston wore a silver brocade gown with a blue fox cape thrown over her thick shoulders, with diamonds in her ears and on her bosom and glittering on her arms—stones that threw Dolly Endean's simple string of pearls and Lady Leila's old-fashioned amethysts completely in the shade. She dressed like a *nouveau riche*, that was true—but at the same time she had a sort of barbaric queenliness that was not unimpressive.

She had about her a curious air of constant watchfulness; her dark eyes were roving here and there about the table as she ate, fastening first on this person, then on that, dwelling on them, observing them with a steadfast intentness that was rather unusual . . . or so I thought. She was particularly observant of Pennoyer and myself, civil to Lady Leila and rather obsequiously polite to Endean, on whose right hand she sat, but on the whole she took little part in the conversation—yet I realized as dinner progressed how right the old Viscount had been, that she was a formidable woman! One could not ignore her. She could have sat at the table completely silent, and all the same one would have been acutely conscious of her presence, of those intent, secretive dark eyes taking in everything and everybody all round. She was somehow like a gigantic cat crouched, brooding, watchful, before a crowd of frolicking mice, waiting until the right moment came to pounce. . . . I pulled myself together with a sudden start. What a horrible simile to think of, and why on earth had I thought of it? Then I caught Pennoyer's eyes across the table, and knew that he had been thinking along much the same lines. . . .

But there was no time to hold a "telepathic conversation". The youngsters were chattering vigorously among themselves, arguing about something . . . just then there was a pause in the conversation at one end of the table, and the voice of the girl called Molly rose clearly.

"Yes, I know I've told you I've seen her before, and you've

laughed at me. But all the same it's true. I *did* see her! And I saw her again last night, right outside George's door, with one hand up to her face as if she were crying."

There was a general laugh at this.

"Well, *well!*" said "Bugs" facetiously. "'Georgie-Porgie, pudding and pie, kissed the girls and made 'em cry' . . . don't tell me you've been making a ghost-girl cry, George?"

George, looking half annoyed and half bewildered, was staring at Molly, and Endean interrupted genially.

"Anybody been seeing the family ghost?" he said, helping himself to mint-sauce.

As Endean spoke I saw Mrs. Kynaston's solemn dark eyes turn to him, then down the table to where Molly was sitting—just opposite to George. There was a sudden gleam of interest in those dark eyes, and she spoke so suddenly that I all-but jumped.

"There ees no such thing as ghosts!" she asserted heavily—almost, I thought, defiantly.

Her accent was odd—un-English, yet not quite French—and I was conscious as she spoke of a faint sense of recognition. I knew that accent—I had heard it somewhere before. I had had the same dim feeling of recognition the moment I set eyes on her—recognition, not of her individually, but of her type. Despite her careful grooming, her manicured nails, her gorgeous gowns and furs and diamonds, she was an alien in the Western world, and in the back of my mind I knew *where* she belonged . . . but I couldn't place it! I watched her keenly as she repeated her words again with an emphasis that I thought the slight occasion scarcely warranted.

"All thees stuff about spirits, and magic, and ghosts . . . it ees plain rubbish! Onlee fairy-tales fit for children."

"Then I must be a child still," said Endean gaily, "as I believe in all sorts of things like that. Magic *and* spirits! And ghosts, and spells. . . ."

As he spoke the last word I saw Mrs. Kynaston's fat ringed hand close suddenly round the stem of her wine-glass. Her black eyes glinted in their painted sockets as she looked at Endean, and she pressed her rouged lips hard together. Obviously the old man's remark had made her either angry . . . or afraid?

She was silent as he went on:

"Come on, children, don't keep us in the dark! Who's been seeing ghosts?"

I noticed that Bentley, the butler who, assisted by a shy young parlourmaid, was handing round the sweet, a dish of ice-cream accompanied by another of fruit-salad, glanced at his master and then down the table towards where the girl Molly was sitting, and I had the impression that, like Mrs. Kynaston, he was waiting tensely for her reply.

"I have," said Molly plumply. "I've seen her twice—the last time was last night, after we'd all gone to bed. Oh, I know you're going to ask me what I'm doing wandering about the corridors at midnight—but the reason isn't romantic, whatever you may be suspecting! I'd eaten too much dinner or something . . . anyway, I felt sick soon after I got into bed, so at last I had to make a bolt for the bathroom. I suppose it was about eleven-thirty or so, that's all. Well, I stayed there a little while waiting to see whether I was going to be sick or not, but after a while the feeling passed off, and after drinking a glass of water I was going back to my bedroom when, lo and behold, as I was going into my room, there she was! Standing outside George's room!"

By now the entire tableful was listening. Dolly Endean spoke next, and her voice was puzzled.

"But how *very* queer!" she said. "Certainly there *is* a ghost here, and sometimes it's been seen. I haven't seen it, but Aunt Leila has, haven't you, darling?"

"Oh yes!" said the lady, placidly eating ice-cream. "I've seen our ghost several times! Only Molly's story doesn't fit it, because our ghost's a man."

There was a general exclamation of astonishment, and Lady Leila went on, her gentle voice as nonchalant as though she was discussing the weather or the last new film.

"Yes, it's a man. We call him the 'White Cavalier', and he was supposed to have been killed in a duel over some woman or other. He haunts that long corridor—just where you saw your mysterious lady, Molly—and sometimes he comes down the stairs and prowls about the hall. But you couldn't possibly mistake him for a girl. He's a very elegant young man in a white velvet coat embroidered with silver, and white satin breeches and a huge peruke . . . sword, red-heeled shoes and all the rest."

Molly shook her head emphatically.

"Oh, *my* ghost wasn't anything like that," she said. "She looks rather Chinesey, if anything—wears a sort of tunic and trousers, it seems to me, though of course she's only a sort of

shadow, and I can't see details. But at the same time I could see her plain enough for me to think, the first time I saw her, that she was real and somebody was playing some joke on poor George!"

"That ees just what it most be," said Mrs. Kynaston harshly. "Some girl who plays a joke. . . ."

"Oh, but it *can't* be that!" said Molly. "Apart from the dress—and I'm sure nobody's brought a Chinese fancy-dress down with her—we're all fair, or fairish, and all our hair's short. And this girl's got two long black plaits hanging down!"

There was a sound of breaking glass and an exclamation from Endean. The stem of Mrs. Kynaston's wine-glass had snapped short in her hand and the red wine was flooding the white tablecloth. . . . I stared and caught a look in the woman's eyes that startled me. A look of mortal fear! And mingled with the fear, another look, of hate and fury both. . . .

She stammered badly as she spoke, and her queer accent was more marked than usual.

"I am sorree . . . an accident! I have a strong hand, or perhaps the glass, it had a flaw. . . . Lady Leila, perhaps we might go to the drawing-room, eh? It is verree hot in here, and I think I feel faint."

Gracefully Lady Leila assented, and the women filed out. At Knaresby the old fashion of letting the women leave the dining-room before the men (which I confess I like) still held, and we men drew up our chairs to the end of the table, where sat the old Viscount. George Kynaston was looking half puzzled, half apologetic.

"I'm so sorry about Francine!" he said. "Breaking that glass, I mean, as well as breaking up the party just when the talk had got interesting. But she simply can't bear any talk about spooks or anything like that—it just gets her so mad she sees red!"

"Why ever is that?" asked Pennoyer mildly. "I should have said that her Red Indian blood would have made her peculiarly psychic? Peculiarly sensitive to spirit-influence and what you call 'spook stuff'?"

Lord Endean looked startled.

"Red Indian!" he said. "I never thought of that! Of course . . ." He checked himself as George spoke laughingly.

"Don't you mention Francine's Indian blood to her!" he said. "That's another thing that gets her awfully wild! But of course,

sir, I know you must be right, though Francine never talks about her parents. If one of my grandparents was French-Canadian, the other *must* have had Red Indian blood, I know that."

"But why should she jib at the idea of having Indian blood?" said Pennoyer. "Most people are proud of it! After all, there's supposed to be Red Indian blood in at least one branch of the Churchill family, or so I understand, and many of the leading American families boast of their Red Indian ancestry."

George shrugged his shoulders and admitted that he was right—but there it was, Francine was like that. But I stared at Pennoyer in amazement.

Of course! That was what I had been mentally seeking—what a fool I had been not to have guessed it. Red Indian. . . .

I remembered a period of my life when I had spent many long months travelling, hunting, exploring in the Canadian Rockies . . . now I knew where I had heard that curious accent, where I had seen that heavy, immobile dark face before, with its air of steady, remorseless watchfulness! A percentage of French-Canadian blood *might* be hers—but I would bet, if it existed at all, it was a very small percentage. The Red Indian blood was predominant—she was the typical Indian squaw! Polished, educated, travelled, Westernized, expensively groomed and dressed, but still, underneath, essentially the squaw. . . .

Once again I had to bring my mind back to the conversation with a jerk. It had passed on to another subject, and something Mollison, the K.C., had said had evidently nettled young George quite considerably, for he was staring angrily at the older man, his face hotly flushed.

"I don't *use* scented stuff," he said brusquely. "Whatever you smelt, sir, it wouldn't have been anything in *my* room! I hate scented lotions and things like that. . . ."

"But I thought," said Endean gently, "that you quite liked them—in *London*? I'm sure you told me there that you used Russian eau-de-Cologne after shaving—and I saw a bottle of verbena bath-crystals in your bathroom on one occasion when I came to dine in Culross Street with you and your mother."

George stared at the old man—there was a queer, half-scared, half-confounded expression in his open face. He passed a hand across his forehead, and when he replied—which was not until after a considerable pause—his voice was bewildered.

"Why . . . yes, of course! You're right, sir! I really don't know why I said that . . . but down here, you know, I don't

seem to like the same sort of things I do in London! It's very queer!" His voice had an oddly appealing note, and even his contemporaries, "Bugs", Frank and the Langland brothers, were silent, impressed, as he went on, puzzled, half-irritated: "I seem to develop different tastes when I'm down here! I forget about dancing and cocktail-parties and all things I like doing in town, and I feel perfectly happy just knocking about in old clothes and riding and tramping and going on the river. . . . It's as if I became quite a different person!" He laughed awkwardly. "So I suppose I lose my taste for using bath-salts and things like that as well. I do assure you I haven't been using anything that's scented since I came down here! So whatever you smelt outside my room . . ."

Mollison laughed as he rose and laid a kindly hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Good heavens, it's not a great thing," he said good-humouredly. "I must have caught a whiff of something the girls have been using—draughty places, these old passages! But anyway, there's nothing sissyish about a chap liking to use hair-lotion or brilliantine scented with pine-needles that I can see. Nice healthy smell. But I do assure you that twice on going to bed I've smelt that smell quite strongly, just outside your door!"

We followed Endean and the K.C. out of the room, the young men chaffing George in their cheerful, irresponsible fashion, Pennoyer lost in a brown study. I had no difficulty in guessing what he was thinking about. . . .

Evidently prompted by her brother, Aunt Leila shooed her flock of guests off to bed at a reasonably early hour that night. Somewhat to Mrs. Kynaston's annoyance, if I read the expression in her sombre dark eyes aright, as she reluctantly rose from the card-table where she had been steadily winning ever since we four elders—Endean, Mollison, Mrs. Kynaston and myself—had sat down after dinner to bridge.

Lady Leila did not play, and Pennoyer, though he played bridge as well as he did many other things, elected not to take a hand that night—I guessed because he wanted to sit back and soak up impressions, in the hope that some of them might help him in the solution of his problem. So he sat and held Lady Leila's wool for her, and chatted idly of this and that, while now and then I caught Mrs. Kynaston's glance resting on him with a meditative, half-doubtful expression. I was by this time sure

that she was by no means mentally as bovine as her bulk and slow movements might first lead one to believe! And while I was quite sure that she could not possibly have any idea of our real errand at Knaresby Hall, it was plain that she was ruminating about us—or at least about Pennoyer—which in itself implied a shadowy sort of question somewhere in the back of her mind.

But she was not so busy analysing us as to allow her attention to be deflected from the main business of the evening, which was to win as much money as possible—and certainly she did that all right. I felt somewhat rueful as I rose from the table—the lady had played for higher stakes by far than I was accustomed to, and had won almost consistently from the beginning. She was a gambler by instinct, that was plain, and the eager gleam in her eyes—even more, the instinctive clutching movement of her plump, heavily-ringed hands as she gathered her winnings towards her after each rubber—indicated more plainly than words what was certainly one of the ruling passions of her life.

We men, that is, Endean, Pennoyer and I, found ourselves discussing her as we sat smoking and drinking in a distant corner of the great drawing-room that night, about half an hour after everybody else had gone to bed. The gilded piano formed an excellent screen, and Bentley, before going upstairs to keep watch on young Kynaston's door, had placed a small table beside our chairs well supplied with smokes, whisky and soda and a bottle of fruit-juice for Pennoyer. The house was fitted throughout with house-telephones connecting up all the main rooms, and Bentley was to give us two buzzes when the boy left his room . . . if he did. It was, of course, quite possible that he would not.

We were discussing Mrs. Kynaston as we sat together—it was plain that the silent, black-eyed, cat-footed woman interested all of us more than a little. Like her son, she presented several conflicting aspects that, quite apart from her unusual personality, were intriguing all of us vastly in our different ways. As the Viscount had already said, it seemed odd that she denied or defied two things of which most people would be proud—her obvious Red Indian blood and the psychic power that usually goes with it. Moreover, her attitude to her son was unusual—as his to her. Neither of them gave any impression of any particular affection towards each other—but that there was some very powerful mutual "link" was plain. She took little notice of George, or he of her. Yet she had only to drop a handkerchief, or even raise a hand or rise from her chair, without glancing

in George's direction, and the boy would be at her side, awaiting orders, as it were—and this occurred constantly, though always in the most natural, instinctive way in the world, George himself clearly not realizing that there was anything odd or unusual in it. Two or three times during the evening I had seen this happen—seen George break off his conversation with whoever he was with, and turn and go across the room to his mother's side, to be sent upstairs for a bottle of smelling salts, for a forgotten lip-stick, or to check up on her bridge winnings.

I had also seen Dolly Endean—from whose side George had thus once been detached—compress her lips and glance meaningly at her father. And though Mrs. Kynaston never turned her dark eyes in the direction of her host and his daughter, I was perfectly sure that she was aware of the glance, and that her action in calling George to her, thus showing how completely he was under her thumb, had been deliberate. Not that I felt she was antagonistic to the engagement—quite the contrary! But I felt that she was quietly determined to show the Endeans that any idea they might have of taking George and leaving his mother on one side was a mistaken one. If George married into aristocratic English circles, his mother intended to come with him! To climb to the social position that I suspected, for all her wealth, she had not yet succeeded in reaching, on the shoulders of her son and her daughter-in-law. . . .

I mentioned my impressions to my companions and they nodded agreement, Endean rather dolefully, and we were embarked on an interesting analysis of the whole situation when two faint buzzes came and the Viscount rose cautiously to his feet.

"That's Bentley buzzing from the end of the corridor that overlooks George's room," he said in a whisper. "The boy's out—and coming down the stairs. Stand by—and when he's gone out on to the terrace, follow him, and good luck to you!"

Even as he spoke the sound of footsteps descending the stairs came to our ears. They came across the hall, ringing clear on the parquet flooring, approached the drawing-room doors, which had been purposely left open—and George Kynaston came into the moonlight that, through the uncurtained windows, flooded the great room.

He wore country clothes and shoes, his thick dark hair was hatless, and he was walking steadily and firmly—as firmly as though he had his eyes open, but they were fast shut! His chin was lifted slightly, and there was a faint, remote smile on his

face as he moved down the long room. It was plain that he, the real George, was away somewhere, dreaming, happy, while his body, automaton-like, moved onwards towards its goal, a goal chosen for it by George himself—or by a Power outside George altogether? It was that that we hoped to discover . . . silently, thanks to the rubber-soled brogues we had both donned, Pen and I moved after him, nodding to the old man standing behind us at the table, and followed him out into the garden.

George was moving fairly fast, as by the time we emerged upon the terrace he was down the steps and half-way across the rose-garden, and we hastened our steps, as once beyond the tennis-courts that lay on the further side of the yew hedge, the "garden" part of the grounds, Endean had warned us, gave way to less cultivated land, with wide stretches of shrubbery, clumps of trees, bushes and undergrowth, in which, plus the darkness, we might easily lose the boy if he got far ahead of us. We dared not use our torches, for fear George turned suddenly, caught the light and was startled into waking . . . it was not likely, but there was the possibility, so we prayed for the moon to remain unclouded as we hurried after the moving figure, and hoped that no unseen step, no rut or furrow unseen in the dark ground would trip us up! It was as well we stuck close to our quarry's heels, as immediately after going through the arched gap in the yew hedge, instead of going straight ahead past the tennis-courts, he turned sharply to the left, and struck across the grounds towards the wilder parkland outside.

We followed as fast as we dared, though now, as ill-luck would have it, a slight wind had arisen, and rags and fragments of dark cloud were blowing across the heavens, now and then obscuring the moon on whose light we were depending. Pennoyer dimmed his torch by folding his handkerchief across the bead of light, and we stumbled first through a huge orchard, knee-deep in grass, where we had much ado not to lose sight of the boy amongst the low-sweeping branches, then across a sunk fence that kept the sheep and cattle outside the grounds, and into the meadowlands outside—George was heading, it seemed, for a distant belt of forest about a mile away. We hurried on, though with occasional stumbles and blunderings into brambles, bracken, rabbit-holes, or tussocks of tough grass, for it was virgin land, that was evident, and pretty rough going . . . it was amazing to see how swiftly and certainly the boy who was leading us walked, without a pause or a stumble, while we, with the full use of our eyes

tripped and swore constantly, as we followed him!

The stretch of grassland we were crossing must have been a good mile across, and we were close to the belt of forest when a cloud drew across the face of the moon, everything went dark, and at the same moment I caught my foot in a deep rabbit-hole and fell smack on my face!

I managed to smother the curse that rose to my lips, but I'd winded myself completely and given my ankle a nasty wrench. Pennoyer paused to see how badly I was hurt, but though the whole incident was over in a few seconds, and I was on my feet again, George had vanished into the dark mass of trees just ahead of us.

"Damn!" said Pennoyer vexedly. "This is more than annoying! That patch of forest's as dark as Egypt—we may hunt half the night and then not find him. I suppose there's no such thing as a path he might have been heading for?"

We searched the surface of the ground right and left with our torches—as our quarry had disappeared there was no longer any reason against using them—but there was nothing in the rough and tangled grass about us that even remotely resembled a path, and at last, with a sigh and a shrug, Pennoyer led the way towards the wood that lay black and forbidding before us.

"We might as well have a shot, at least," he said over one shoulder. "If we fail—and I'm afraid we will, it'll be like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay—well, we shall have to try again, that's all. Oh, hell!" As his foot sank ankle-deep in an unseen stream he swore gently again beneath his breath as he drew it out, then paused suddenly. "Hullo! Jerry, what's that? Do you see anything—there, against the trees?"

I raised my eyes—they had been fixed on the ground as I followed the light of my torch, not wishing to share Pennoyer's experience and walk into the stream—and started in astonishment. For against the sheer black wall of the belt of trees that loomed not twenty yards ahead of us a faint shadowy figure seemed to be standing! It was much too vague to note any details, it was indeed more like a pillar of faint grey smoke than anything else, yet somehow it suggested, if only dimly, a feminine shape, and for some reason my mind fled back to that queer story of a Chinese woman seen outside young Kynaston's door. . . .

"Who—*what* is it?" I whispered.

Pennoyer shook his head.

"God knows!" he returned. "But that she's something to do

with young Kynaston, I'm quite sure. Come on, this grows interesting! Put out your torch—I don't care if you do come another cropper! The light might scare her—and anyway, we can only see her in the dark. Maybe she'll get clearer presently—come on!”

I am not used to ghost-chasing, and I admit that my flesh crept eerily as I fell in behind Pennoyer's determined back, strode across the stream and struggled up a slope thick with undergrowth towards where that faint shadowy figure seemed to wait against her background of trees. As we neared her she seemed to recede, as though afraid to let us approach any nearer, but when we hesitated she paused too—presumably to indicate that we should follow, though keeping our distance—and slowly, stumblingly, we followed as she led into the heart of the wood. The going was tough and painful, as branches caught at us, and thorns and twigs and brambles tore our clothes and our skin. We tripped over roots and slipped and slid wildly in the dark, but doggedly we followed our eerie leader, and by degrees my eyes, growing used to the blackness, began to pick her out a little better—but at best it was like following a wisp of grey smoke that somehow vaguely happened to resemble a woman! A small, slim woman wearing a shapeless, tunic-like sort of garment on the upper half of her person, beneath which were certainly trousers—this I could see fairly plainly as she moved—with two plaits swaying each side of her shadowy face, and what seemed to be a sort of fillet round her head with a long, upright object standing upright in it. . . . As I noted this last, suddenly recollection awoke, and I leant forward to whisper to Pennoyer.

“Pen—I've got it!” I hissed excitedly. “I've only just realized it—she isn't a Chinese at all, she's *Indian*! Look at the squaw's feather in her headband!”

But there was no use imagining I could put anything across old Pen!

“Of course she is! I knew that some time ago,” he said calmly. “It's the ghost that the girl Molly saw. Bentley has seen her too, once or twice, it seems—did you see him start when Molly was describing the ghost at dinner? I *thought* it must be an Indian squaw when she described it, though to the hasty eye, seen only as an impression, that straight Indian tunic and trousers might well give a vaguely Chinese effect.”

“Have you any idea who she is then?” I asked.

“Not yet,” Pennoyer said, forging steadily ahead amidst the

crackle and snap of breaking bushes, his eyes fast on the pale, flitting shadow ahead. "But I'm satisfied of this—that Mrs. Kynaston knows who she is and fears her! Remember the snapping of the wine-glass stem? There's something grim behind all this, and that good lady's connected with it . . . and meantime our little ghost's plainly turned up to help us to follow George when we lost him in the dark. And I must say I'm obliged to her . . . we should never have had a dog's chance in this place. Hullo . . . why, she's gone!"

We halted. Yes, the pale little shape that had led us so far had vanished like a blown-out candle-flame, and we stood still for a moment trying to get our bearings—and just then, thank goodness, the clouds cleared from off the face of the moon and a few shafts of pale silvery light came filtering down through the dense ceiling of branches that arched above us. High above us the heads of hoary forest ancients, chestnut, elm, oak, beech, larch, towered aloft towards the star-spattered sky that showed in glimpses between their huge branches, and all about us rose the scent of green and growing things—and strongest of all, the aromatic perfume that I had smelt before. The scent of pine-trees, balsamic, penetrating.

"Pen," I whispered, "there's that scent *again!*"

Pennoyer nodded his head and held up his hand for silence . . . for suddenly, as we stood there, quite close to us a voice began to sing. A man's voice—a voice strong and rough in quality, but by no means unmelodious. The voice, one would have said, was of a man of about forty-five or so, a robust, hearty fellow accustomed to trolling out his songs aloud on long and lonely trails, beside gleaming camp-fires, through mountain gorges and silent snow-filled valleys—and he was singing an old French song.

A song sung in a queer, guttural sort of French, that ran to a curious rhythmic sort of melody, two beats to a bar, then three and back again after a few bars to the original two-beat time—and instantly I knew again that feeling of recognition! As with Mrs. Kynaston's accent, the song brought to me a hint, a flavour of something once known, dimly remembered.

*"Quand on part du chanquiers . . .
Mes chers amis, tous le cœur gai!
Pour aller voir tous nos parents,
Mes chers amis, le cœur content!"*

Envoyons d'avant!

Nos gens

Envoyons d'avant!"

The gay lilt held kinship with those ancient action-songs that once accompanied almost every human activity. In remote parts of the north of Scotland, in the Orkneys, in parts of Ireland and Wales they still linger, the "caulking song", the weaving and milking and flax-beating chants, all set to a deliberate swing or beat, descriptive of the work they accompanied . . . this song belonged to the same group. Somewhere I had heard it. . . .

But I had no time to waste in trying to unravel a tangled thread of memory. Pennoyer had moved forward, and perforce I moved with him, and in the faint moonlight that now filtered down through the branches I saw that we stood on the edge of a deep hollow at the foot of a group of birch and pine trees—and below, curled asleep upon a pile of moss bracken and leaves, lay the boy we were seeking, young George Kynaston! We could see him plainly—and as he lay sleeping there, he was singing! At least, the singing came from his mouth—but instantly I knew that it was never George who sang.

George Kynaston's voice was a pleasant, youthful tenor—but this was the sonorous, rough-toned organ of a man twice his age. As I had had practically no experience then of mediumistic work, where a small, slight woman with a light, feminine voice will speak and sing and even swear in a harsh masculine timbre, I gaped, and Pennoyer, seeing my amazement, answered in a low voice.

"It's all right—George is entranced. Out of his body for the moment, and somebody else is in possession. Somebody belonging to Canada, I guess, who can help us to solve the mystery. A trapper, and hunter, I *think*—that's one of the old French-Canadian boat-songs, a sort of sea-shanty of the river. You must have heard their songs sung sometimes by a group of rowers pulling a heavy boat. . . ."

"Of course!"

Again Pennoyer's uncanny prescience had filled in a gap in my lesser knowledge. I would have asked another question, but as though the sound of Pennoyer's voice, low as it had been, had come to the ears of the sleeping singer, the song broke off and the sleeping boy stirred and turned his head towards us. His eyes were closely shut and he was plainly still sleeping—but that

he, or rather the entity who was in temporary occupation of his body, could see us was plain, as his next words proved.

"*Eh bien, messieurs!* So you are come—my leetle girl-friend lead you all right, eh? It was time—eh yes, it was time. Come, come—you come down and sit close, eh? It will not wake our boy—my leetle charge." The deep voice laughed on a note half-jesting, half-tender. "He sleep well—and I, Jacques Lorraine, have much to tell you. Come sit, sit!"

It was with a confused sensation of living in a dream that I scrambled after Pennoyer down into the hollow and curled myself up beside George, with my back against the slope. As I settled back comfortably the speaker laughed again.

"Ha! Here we have one who is scare', eh? But he is a good fellow all ze same!" he commented. "But *you*"—the sleeping head half turned towards Pennoyer—"you are one of Us, *mon-sieur*. You will need no explain' of what I shall tell you. . . ."

"I am deeply grateful that you are able to come through," said Pennoyer, "because although I was beginning to gather various threads together, it looked like taking a very long time, and in contacting anyone directly connected with the boy's Canadian life I am being greatly helped."

The sleeper nodded.

"I know. Well, I can tell you what will knit you ze t'reads you hold into a true pattern—a pattern zat will release zis child from hees bondage, release him so zat he come back to Canada, where he was born and where he belong. For zis he was sent to you, because alzo we hav' done all we can to 'wake' him, we are on zis side only, and we are limited . . . an' *she* is ver' strong!"

"You mean his mother?" asked Pennoyer.

The voice snorted in bitter contempt.

"His mozer?" it retorted. "She—*zat*—is not his mozer! Zat which led you to me is—*was*—his mozer. Ah, you stare, but it is so. Now listen, *messieurs*, and I will tell you a story. I am—I was till six years ago—one Jacques Lorraine of Beauvallet, Ontario, Canada. A man not ver' good, not ver' bad, part French, part Indian—*n'importe!* I was trapper, hunter, guide—an' I like to say friend and *camarade* to ze fazer of zis boy. Ah, *les beaux jours* when I went hunting wit' my friend Paul Kynaston—when togezer we made camp in ze woods, or stalk moose, or shoot our boat t'rough ze rapids . . . you hear me sing my old song as you come, eh? Zat song I sing often when I live' on earth, when I drove my boat along ze wild rivers of Canada wit'

George's fazer behind me, and later on wit' leetle George as well . . . I teach it to him, and he sing it wit' me, often and often!" The voice dropped to a sigh. "But now . . . she . . . zat witchwoman, she steal all his *mémoire* from him, and my leetle boy remember me no more!"

"Never mind, we'll bring you back to his mind again," said Pennoyer. "Go on—tell us the story from the beginning."

With another sigh the speaker took up his tale, and grim enough it was. But I shall tell it as a separate story (which indeed it is) in my own words, lest the reproduction of Jacques' oddly-accented English might grow tedious after a while. And here it is. . . .

Some twenty-odd years before this story opens, one Paul Kynaston, an Englishman with the yen for wandering that distinguishes so many Englishmen, wandered into the tiny village of Beauvallet, Ontario, Canada, engaged a guide—Jacques Lorraine—and set to work to prepare for a long expedition after moose into the wild northern country. He was young—only about thirty or so—obviously well-to-do, and unattached, so needless to say the local girls at once made plans to capture so attractive a prize!

Kynaston was a cheery, gregarious sort of fellow, and made himself at home at once in Beauvallet, getting friendly with the inhabitants, buying a great deal of his gear, furs, provisions and so on in the few small stores, and spending his evenings sitting yarning in the "local"—a rough, wood-built shanty called, probably in grim memory of some early clash between Indians and whites, "La Tête Coupée". On his first arrival in the village, Paul Kynaston rented a room in this inn, until he moved to a tiny shack of his own, where he and Jacques Lorraine fended for themselves—and so he became on friendly terms with the inn-keeper and his daughter. And that acquaintance led to many things.

Beauvallet, outside its beauty—which was remarkable, even in a region where beauty is so common as to be almost *unremarkable*—was the usual sleepy little valley hamlet inhabited by farmers, traders, a few storekeepers, odd craftsmen, as builders, carpenters and the like, a chemist who was also doctor and vet to the community, an elderly priest who ran the tiny school as well as his church, and a small floating population of trappers, guides, hunters and so on—all French-Canadians, and many with a strong admixture of Indian blood, as a large number of them had

married Indian wives or been born of Indian mothers. Indeed, the leading man of the village, the innkeeper, old Gaspard Legros, was reputed, despite his name, to be actually a full-blooded Indian who had somewhere early in life acquired a smattering of Western education, and on settling in Beauvallet, in French-Canadian territory, deliberately exchanged his Indian name for a French one.

Certainly Gaspard's looks lent colour to the story—a dour, silent old man six foot high, with intent black eyes, greasy black hair, and a mouth like a hard slash in his copper-brown face. He had few friends in the village—people steered clear of him for some reason or other, and there were dark murmurs that he was an “ill man to cross”, that it “wasn't lucky to see much of old Gaspard”, and so on. He had no wife—he had been a widower when he came to Beauvallet, and nobody knew whom or what his wife had been, though his daughter Francine, who kept house for him and ran the bar, swore that her mother had been of pure French blood, and of good family at that.

Francine Legros was a good-looking wench, though with her father's intimidating dark gaze and a trick of hardening her lips if she were crossed that made her singularly like him. But she was a handsome piece all right, tall and buxom, with thick, silky black hair that she used to curl and tie with red ribbons or stick with coloured combs for the Saturday night “hops” to which all the youth of the village used to flock. These were merry gatherings, held in the largest building in the village, the log-built schoolhouse, with all the desks and chairs cleared to the side, and concluding with a picnic supper to which everybody contributed something, from a batch of doughnuts to a jug of maple syrup, or merely half a dozen hard-boiled eggs.

Merry gatherings, indeed, with the old folks gathered round the black iron stove at one end, and the wooden walls re-echoing to the squeak of old Dan's fiddle, and the beat of little Follet's drum, while the floor shook with the thunder of dancing feet, and Francine Legros, with her flashing eyes and carnation cheeks, was queen of the ball!

Francine could dance like a feather, and with her father's money could sport store-bought shoes, bright-coloured shawls and gay new dresses, to say nothing of beads and ear-rings and ornaments for her rich black hair in far greater plenty than any of the other village girls. She was tall, and matched Paul Kynaston's lean, rangy height, and he used to dance with her

more often than with any of the other girls, so that her cheeks used to flush with triumph, and she would toss her head as she walked off the floor and look round at the other girls as though to challenge them . . . and they liked her none the better for it! Indeed, Francine Legros was not popular with the other girls of Beauvallet. The stories that seemed to follow her father like a shadow, followed her too—no girl was on really intimate terms with Francine Legros, though everybody took care to keep friendly with her, using the term in a general sense, because it was whispered that, like her father, she had "powers". She could ill-wish anybody who crossed her, bring disasters upon them—anyway, it was not wise to take a chance. So the women of Beauvallet were wary of Francine Legros, as of her father, and Francine laughed and enjoyed it—to be feared was to be powerful, and Mlle. Legros loved the feeling of power!

So things went on, and Francine flaunted her triumph, and old Gaspard rubbed his hands at the rich marriage his daughter was going to make—though, indeed, Paul had never committed himself in any way and it might well be (said Jacques) that, accustomed to the more easy-going ways of the Western world, where men and maidens go about constantly together without comment, he did not in the least realize that by seeing so much of the girl he was laying himself open to misinterpretation. Anyway, certain it was that Francine Legros and her old father both thought this rich fish well and safely landed, and they were sadly disconcerted when at last Paul Kynaston and Jacques departed on their long-delayed hunting-trip, and Francine's finger still lacked a betrothal-ring! Paul had not even spoken to her father, and there were those among the feminine inhabitants of Beauvallet who rubbed their hands and smiled, well content.

So for many days after Paul Kynaston's departure, the inn-keeper's handsome daughter was angry and sullen, for she had counted upon their engagement being declared before he left Beauvallet and on being able to spend her time during his absence preparing for her wedding and boasting to the other girls of the house she would have in England, the wealth, the position, and all the fine friends she would meet.

Though she took care that no hint of this leaked out to people at Beauvallet, for several years before coming with her father to "La Tête Coupée" Francine had worked as maid in a large hotel in Montreal, and had there caught a sufficient number of glimpses of the life of fashion, or travel, wealth, adventure, to have devel-

oped a desperate longing to climb out of her own world into the world of cosmopolitan society. And though it is true that Paul's good looks and charm had roused her passion, the fact that he was English, rich, and so able to give her the *entrée* into the cosmopolitan life she craved, played a large part—even, perhaps, the main part—in his attraction for her.

But after a while she brightened up, and considered that, after all, he was coming back. He had said so! He had left her in charge of all his letters and parcels, she held the key of the shack that he had shared with Jacques, with all his spare things in it—he would return laden with furs and lay them at her feet, together with his offer of marriage, and all would be well! So she cheered up and went about boasting of what would happen when Paul returned, and counting the days he might be away . . . and meantime Paul Kynaston and his guide and friend Jacques Lorraine were ploughing their way deeper and deeper into the frozen wilds.

This is no place in which to describe their adventures, which were many and thrilling. But at last one adventure more thrilling than the others ended in a badly-broken leg for Paul, and for miles Jacques dragged him on a sledge over the frozen snow to a tiny village of which he knew, buried in a fold of the mountains near by. They arrived just in time to save Paul's life—for between the pain and the bitter cold he was in a high fever—and found lodging in the tiny house of the pastor of the village . . . Père Fleuron, a very old man, a saint, Jacques avowed. Père Fleuron gave up his bed to the Englishman, and himself nursed him, assisted by the faithful Jacques and by his godchild and adopted daughter, Taliseh, a young Indian girl, the daughter of a powerful Chief who, becoming a Christian, had left his only daughter to the care of his friend and pastor as he lay dying.

Taliseh had been brought up from the age of three by the priest, and when Paul Kynaston was carried helpless into the little wooden house where she had spent her life, she was just eighteen—and as beautiful as she was good and sweet. Within twenty-four hours of regaining his consciousness Paul Kynaston knew that he had found his fate—and Taliseh, daughter of Flying Hawk, Chief of the Hurons, knew likewise that she had found hers. And when Paul's leg was fully healed, the two were married in the tiny church of the village to the acclamation of the villagers, and sped upon their way with the blessing of good old Father Fleuron . . . for seeing that a good and honest fellow

had come his ward's way, the priest, knowing his own life was soon to draw to a close, had thanked God, and sent his beloved god-daughter on her way rejoicing.

So with the faithful Jacques in attendance the bride and bridegroom set out for Beauvallet—not without certain qualms on the part of Jacques when he visualized their reception at the hands of the fair Francine! For years the trapper had made Beauvallet his headquarters, and he knew the formidable qualities of the young lady's temper!

So nervous, in fact, did he grow, that when a stray Indian passed their camp one night when they were but three days' distant from Beauvallet, Jacques took it upon himself privately to bribe the man to go to Beauvallet and circulate the news of Paul Kynaston's marriage, so that Mlle. Legros might have time to get over at least some of her mortification before the arrival of the newly-weds. Already a slave at the feet of his master's gentle, dark-eyed bride, it was unthinkable, thought the French trapper, that Taliseh should run the risk of an ungracious reception, if no worse, on her arrival in Beauvallet. . . .

Jacques Lorraine—who owed an old grudge to Francine Legros which has nothing to do with this story—would have given a good deal to know how she received the news that Beaver Tail, the Indian runner, brought her! But that he was never destined to hear. Though subsequent enquiries among the women in Beauvallet showed that after her interview with Beaver Tail the innkeeper's daughter had shut herself up in her room and refused to come out until her father, silent, heavy-footed, had at last gone up to her . . . and thereafter they had been closeted together for several hours, during which Francine's voice had been heard weeping, cursing, arguing. . . .

But when she finally reappeared it was plain that she had made up her mind to accept the situation philosophically, and while faintly disappointed, the women could not but admire the gracefully-friendly way in which she welcomed Paul and his bride, when two days later they arrived at Beauvallet.

The rest of the inhabitants had gone out of their way to show their pleasure at the return of the Englishman they all liked so well. Half a dozen women had cleaned out the hut, put up fresh curtains, made preserves and flapjacks and even a cake, with icing and decorations all complete. Michel Faure had cut a huge pile of logs to keep the wedding fires going, Dornier the trapper had sent along the skin of a huge black bear to keep the bride-

bed warm, from Bichaud the butcher had come a tub of salt meat and a side of bacon, from Anton's *charcuterie* a whole Dutch cheese, and most amazing of all, a keg of real French brandy from Legros, of all people, which last present made people look at each other and open their eyes and wonder, for had not his daughter been slighted, and in the eyes of all Beauvallet?

But there was no sign of any rancour in the attitude of Legros and his daughter towards the newly-married couple, and if Paul Kynaston had ever wasted any time flirting with the black-eyed Francine, he certainly did not waste any now. He had no eyes for anybody but his young bride, whose shy beauty and sweetness of nature charmed the village as they had charmed him—and when he bought a plot of land among the pines a little way outside Beauvallet, and invited every man who wanted a job to come and help in the building of a new house, everybody was delighted that he meant to settle down among them. To buy land, found a family, encourage local trade and enterprise—that was the sort of settler they wanted! But while the new house was abuilding, perforce Paul was away a great deal from the wooden shack he had shared with Jacques, where for the nonce his wife and he were living, and Taliseh was left much to herself.

Not that she minded that! Your Indian girl is too well used to solitude, to the vast silences of the forest, to find them strange—and besides, Taliseh was busy all day weaving mats and rugs, beading moccasins and plaiting string for chair-seats, as well as making all sorts of things with her needle, first for herself and her lover and master, and after a while, for another—a little life that was in its own good time to join their perfect partnership to make it even more perfect.

But Paul's long absences each day gave Francine Legros the chance that she was seeking for, and before long she was daily dropping in to see the shy little newcomer, to bring her a jar of cookies or newly-preserved blueberries, to lend her the pattern of a new dress, or some amusing book or magazine, or simply to sit and talk and laugh with her—and it was not long before a close friendship was springing up between Francine Legros and Taliseh, the innocent girl-bride of Paul Kynaston! At first Taliseh, unused to such direct approaches and content with her own company, was stiff and not too welcoming; but Francine's persistence and refusal to see a snub soon began to break down the younger girl's protective barrier of shyness and reserve, and moreover, Taliseh's own kindness of heart made it very difficult

to be rude or hurtful to anybody trying to be friendly.

Taliseh had had few girl-friends of her own, and those she possessed she had left behind with Père Fleuron in the mountains amongst which she had been born . . . and none of them were in the least like this flaming, laughing, thrilling creature! Francine was then about twenty-six and in the zenith of her beauty. She could talk well, laugh, tell stories and jokes, sing all manner of songs in a throaty contralto tuneful enough to listen to, she had read plenty of books and had travelled—not as much as she boasted, but far more than this woodland flower who had, until her marriage, never set foot outside the mountain village where she had lived with her adoptive father, Père Fleuron. Francine was the belle of Beauvallet, her father the leading man . . . it was not difficult to dazzle the gentle, unsuspecting young girl, and within a matter of weeks the two were bosom friends.

Jacques Lorraine, taken aback at this unexpected development, brooded darkly and doubtfully upon it, and the women of the village whispered between themselves and shook their heads and declared that it boded ill—that Francine Legros was up to no good! It was simply not natural that she should be so friendly with the girl who, even though innocently, had taken her man from her—and one or two, greatly daring, ventured to drop a hint to Paul Kynaston. But he merely looked puzzled . . . as indeed he was!

It seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that the two girls should become friendly, and he was glad—so he said, and he said it quite sincerely—that Francine was being so nice to his little wife and taking the trouble to “show her the ropes” in Beauvallet. So things went on, and the two girls became more and more intimate friends.

Taliseh, fascinated, was wax in the hands of the older girl. Jacques Lorraine scowled while Paul beamed and whistled as his house grew like magic beneath the hands at work on it, and the village looked askance, and old Legros looked—just as he always did, which was completely expressionless! And then at last the house was finished, a handsome six-roomed cabin about a mile outside Beauvallet, perched somewhat above it on a flat plateau of land and backed by serried ranks of pine and larch, birch and chestnut, climbing up the sheer mountainside, with the river running deep and wide just below the lip of the plateau—a lovely home, well-fitted for the lovely young girl who was to rule it. It was comfortably furnished, partly with stuff made in Beau-

vallet by the skilled hands of men used to working in wood and hide and fur, and partly with store-bought rugs and padded chairs and hangings brought by river from La Fronde, the big port situated some eighty miles distant at the river mouth—and when all was done, and the young Kynastons moved in, Beauvallet heaved a sigh of relief. Perhaps, now they had gone to live outside the village, that Legros girl would keep her fingers out of the young Kynastons' pie—but they reckoned without their host!

A couple of miles' walking was nothing to a strong young woman, and thrice a week at least saw the innkeeper's daughter striding gaily up the rough track that wound from the village to the plateau on which stood the pretty little house, cunningly planned so as to leave space on the landward side to extend and build on if need be, with the beginnings of a garden already laid out on the wide sweep of land that stretched between house and river, and even a driveway already made before the house up which, Paul Kynaston swore, he would drive a brand-new car before the year was out. Many dark and evil thoughts surged through the mind of Francine Legros as she strode up that same drive towards the house that, but for circumstance, might have been built for her!

But she let no sign of them appear, and remained the same gay, affectionate, delightful friend to her *chère petite* Taliseh who, now heavy with child, clung closer and closer to her *alter ego*, and insisted on her coming as often as she could to cheer her up, till at last, growing a little weary of Mlle. Legros' constant visits, Paul ventured to hint that he liked his wife to himself now and then! But Taliseh, hurt and amazed, opened her lovely eyes so widely at him and reproached him so gravely for being ungrateful to Francine, who took the trouble to walk all the way from Beauvallet to "Beaumanoir" (for so they named their dream-house) so often to see her, that he said no more. Only stroked her black hair and told himself he had married a child and must treat her as tenderly as one would treat a child. . . .

There were those among the women of Beauvallet who afterwards declared that if it had not been for the fact that Paul, nervous of his young wife's approaching ordeal, brought down an experienced midwife and doctor from La Fronde to come and attend her in her labour, that the child, a bonny little boy, would never have seen the light! And certain it is that when Francine found that she was not to attend her friend in her time of trial, she flamed into a terrible rage and talked darkly of many things,

and a few of her sayings were heard and noted down, and added to Beauvallet's distrust of her.

The young mother's trial was a long and hard one, and she took long to recover from it, so it was some time before the two girls met again—and then young George Kynaston was in the charge of a nurse, a motherly middle-aged Frenchwoman, a distant relation of Jacques Lorraine. And whatever dark thoughts may have been lying in the back of the older girl's complex mind, they had no chance of coming forward and being translated into any form of action!

Mère Bionnet was far too efficient and conscientious ever to leave her charge unguarded! Also it may be that Jacques Lorraine had hinted certain things to her—at any rate, the young son and heir of Paul Kynaston was rarely left alone, and when Mlle. Legros was about, never!

As time went on and Taliseh recovered her health once more, Mère Bionnet proved so pleasant and satisfactory a member of the household that she became permanently installed as part nurse, part cook-housekeeper and all-round help—a plan suggested by Jacques Lorraine and immediately approved by Paul Kynaston, as it released his delicate young wife from over-much housework and baby-care, and allowed her to spend more time with him. The baby thrived; Jacques Lorraine, relieved from anxiety concerning his master's wife and son, went about his work cheerfully once more, and everybody was satisfied except Francine Legros . . . and she was bitterly angry! She had counted upon the nurse's leaving when Taliseh was fully recovered from her ordeal, and had, indeed, laughingly alluded more than once to the time when she and Taliseh would "have the baby all to themselves"—and when she found the newcomer installed as a permanent member of the household she was furious!

Knowing, as she could not help but know, that Jacques Lorraine neither liked nor trusted her, she had guessed, as soon as she found that Mère Bionnet was a relative of his, that he had somehow managed to get her installed as a watchdog, and when she found her likely to stay indefinitely she went as far as she dared to try and get the old woman dismissed—but failed dismally. She dared not be insolent to Mère Bionnet, who had a formidable eye and would, she knew, have gone direct to Paul Kynaston with a complaint . . . and it did not square her plans to have anything happen that might upset his present idea of her as a good-hearted, impulsive, affectionate girl who adored his

wife and child. And she soon found that it was waste of time trying to poison Taliseh's mind against the old woman. She tried more than once, but the girl was so essentially honest, so innocent, that she merely looked puzzled and grieved at hints or innuendoes, and any direct accusation would have immediately been taken either to Mère Bionnet—or to Paul. Therefore, with a huge effort Francine Legros mastered her anger, and for the time being accepted the situation. She was of Indian blood . . . and Indian blood is patient.

Well, so time passed on. Paul Kynaston was a busy man, for he had bought land and more land, both in the valley and at La Fronde, and was full of plans for developing and extending it. The house on the plateau was improved and enlarged, for presently a baby girl came to companion young George—but alas! she did not survive the sharp snowy winters of Beauvallet. And when a third baby, dying at birth, almost cost the young mother her life, the doctor said, "No more", and little George, now a sturdy, handsome youngster of five or six, became the very core and centre of his young parents' lives. He could skate and use snow-shoes from his babyhood, for Jacques made him a tiny pair of each almost as soon as he learnt to walk. From the half-Indian village boys he learnt to handle first the sling-shot¹ almost as adroitly as they did, then the bow and arrow, and the throwing-stick that kills without a sound, and as soon as his legs grew long enough to straddle it, Paul bought him a pony, on which, with his father at his side, he ranged the valley as far as it was rideable. In the summer he learnt to swim like a young eel in the wide reaches and pools of the river, to fish and to manage a canoe like a young Indian—and always Jacques Lorraine was at his heels, guarding, training, watching him like a faithful dog, all the time aware that beside the ordinary dangers that lie in wait in a wild country for a little boy, there were other dangers for him that still lay in wait. . . . Dangers that were prepared to wait their chance, and would not spoil by waiting!

Francine Legros' plans were merely ripening. Thwarted at the start, she had been forced into temporary retreat—but she was biding her time. Strong as was her passion for Paul Kynaston—even stronger her passion for his money and position, and the chance they offered of leaving Canada and going out to the modern world and the fashionable life for which she hungered—

¹ A sort of catapult. A strip of thin elastic skin used with small sharp stones.

her sense of caution, her capacity to wait, was even stronger. Some day—some day—she would get her way! And meantime she remained the affectionate friend, generous, kindly, ever-ready to please—"Georgie's auntie" as she humorously called herself, though to be truthful George never evinced any particular liking for his "auntie", and tended to avoid her as much as possible. Which puzzled his simple mother greatly, as he was a friendly, affectionate little boy as a rule. And then . . . then the blow fell!

It was spring, and the river in full spate with the melted snows coming down from the mountains, the birds and beasts bringing forth their round-eyed young, and the smell of new growth in the air. The first aconites were showing in the woods, where here and there a green patch showed where the snows had melted away, the sticky red buds of the maples were just beginning to plump out, and here and there in the undergrowth a green mist showed where the tiny young leaves were beginning to uncurl . . . and rejoicing in the sunny warmth and the blue skies, young George insisted upon a picnic. And since anything young George said was law, with an indulgent smile Paul Kynaston put aside his work for the day, told Jacques to get the sleigh ready, and Taliseh, all excitement, telephoned—for by now, thanks to Paul's enterprise and generosity, there was a tiny telephone-exchange in the village—to her friend Francine, and begged her to join the party.

Both Paul and Jacques Lorraine heard her speaking in the corner of the hall, from where they were talking in Paul Kynaston's little study, and for a moment both men looked at each other . . . and looked away. Each knew the other's thoughts . . . *must* she be asked? Paul would have preferred his wife and son to himself, and Jacques Lorraine . . . well, as always, his mind leapt to the alert when the innkeeper's daughter was around. But what could he say? And for Paul, he told himself not to be selfish, that every woman needs some feminine companionship! Taliseh had no sisters or cousins, and she was fortunate in having so kind and willing a friend as Francine . . . and so she came, and the expedition set off.

The girls and little George and a fine load of provisions were stowed away, with plenty of wraps—for despite the signs of spring, there was a nip in the air still—in the smooth-running sleigh, drawn by a pretty little roan mare that Paul had bought for his love the first winter she spent in Beauvallet; and away they went along the river-bank, with Paul and Jacques riding

beside them, laughing, talking, cracking jokes . . . yes, it all started gaily enough. Paul had planned to turn inland, once past the spur of the mountains, and make for a certain little glen, well sheltered from the wind and away from the river; but Francine pleaded for a lovely spot she knew far along the river-bank under a clump of pines, and as Taliseh seconded her, Paul gave in. Afterwards Jacques Lorraine found out surely enough why the dark girl had insisted on that precise spot. But by that time it was too late. . . .

They tied the horses safely to a group of trees, and lighted a fine fire and cooked the plump trout that they had brought with them in bacon-fat, and fried big squares of bread in the pan with them, and ate them with hot potatoes baked in their skins in the ashes, and washed them down with huge cups of steaming coffee. And there was a luscious wedge of cheese to follow, and a jar of pickled onions, and flapjacks, and some of Mère Bionnet's special ginger cookies to finish the feast, together with a box of sugared fruits that Francine had brought along with her. Everybody ate far more than they would have done at home—as is customary at a picnic—and laughed and joked and told stories, and everything went merry as a marriage bell. And when afterwards George begged to be taken exploring along the banks of the river by his father and Jacques, while the two girls rested and packed up the remains of the meal, even Jacques, with his anxious love, began to relax, to feel a little less uneasy.

The child would be with them—they could keep an eye on him. The picnic was half-way over, it was surely unlikely that anything untoward would happen now? But alas! in his engrossment with danger to the child, Jacques overlooked possible danger to the mother, and as he trudged away with Paul Kynaston and his little son, and smiled to see the child wave his hand and call out his farewells to Taliseh, smiling at him from her seat on a heap of rugs under the tall pines, he never guessed that little George was in truth waving farewell to his young mother. . . .

The men were away barely half an hour when they heard someone calling, calling wildly, and turning saw Francine Legros, her hair dishevelled, her scarf and hood gone, her dress heavy and sagging with water, stumbling towards them down the trail. Livid with fear, Paul Kynaston stood rooted to the ground as she came towards them, crying incoherently, wringing her hands, distracted . . . something he caught about "Taliseh . . . lost her balance . . . the river", and without a word he went rushing

back to where he had left his wife.

Where they had built their fire and made such good cheer under the pines the bank was high and overhung the river, which was very deep there and flowing swiftly, coloured like skim-milk with the mountain snows that weighted it . . . and lo, at the very brink of the bank, a great chunk of earth had fallen away! The gash stared like a gap in a row of teeth—and there, according to the story that Francine distractedly sobbed out, as Taliseh stood looking down at the river, the bank had given way and she had gone down, to be instantly swept away by the boiling current!

Frantic, the older girl—or so she said—had run along the bank to where the waters spread out into a wider and shallower reach, and there waded in, hoping to seize her friend and drag her to the shore, but though she had waded in up to her shoulders, and tried to reach the floating girl, she failed—the current was too strong, and apparently Taliseh had been knocked senseless by the fall and could do nothing to try and save herself. Distraught, Francine had dragged herself out of the water just in time to avoid being swept away too, and standing helpless on the bank, had seen the younger girl swept round the bend of the river towards the rapids some ten miles further down . . . and knowing that she could do no more, wrung the water from her dress and rushed to find Paul. But it was too late! The tale of the days of Taliseh, daughter of Flying Hawk, Chief of the Hurons, was ended. Her body was ultimately found caught amongst the rocks of the rapids, tossed wildly to and fro in the furious waters as they rushed headlong towards La Fronde and the sea. Almost every bone in the slight body was broken by the beating of the waves and the rocks, but the grave little dark face was untouched, the soft black eyes open, so that they looked seriously up at the sky as they laid her wrapped in her favourite homewoven blanket, all gay reds and yellows and browns, in a narrow grave amongst the pines behind the house she loved . . . and somehow, Paul Kynaston tried to take up his life again.

But without much success. The springs of interest and energy had been broken, and he would sit staring before him for hours at a time, listless, absent, only waking to life for a while when his little son timidly came up to him. Yet after a time, sluggishly, wearily, the wheels of ordinary life began to turn again, and inevitably, as they turned, he found himself relying more and more upon Francine Legros for company, for amusement and distraction . . . and cleverly indeed she played her part!

She had stressed—though delicately enough—from the beginning how hard she had tried to save the life of her friend, even to risking the loss of her own life; and as time went on it seemed that Paul came to believe that she *had* actually almost lost her own, and became proportionately grateful—though actually, as the village whispered, what was there to prove that she had done anything of the kind? Easy enough to walk into the river and get wet to the armpits, and tell a fine story as to the reason—that proves nothing at all! And as for a chunk of earth breaking away under Taliseh's light weight, that, again, was a fine tale, said the villagers derisively—and there were those that said boldly that they had no doubt that Francine Legros had pushed the younger girl into the stream and then hastily levered off the lump of earth into the river below to lend colour to the accident story! And certainly Jacques Lorraine, ferreting about for his own satisfaction's sake at the spot where the tragedy had taken place, found hidden behind a tree a stout wooden stake with earth and moss stuck on one end, that had plainly been used to dig up or loosen something—and try as he might, no other portion of the bank near by seemed in the least loose or friable. But it was all supposition, and nothing could be proved, and as the days passed on, and Paul Kynaston was for ever telephoning for Francine Legros to come up and help him with something, to advise him or to accompany him somewhere, her old air of triumph came back, the sparkle to her eyes and the carnation flush to her cheeks, so that she looked again the handsome wench in her twenties with whom the young Englishman had danced eight long years ago.

And at last old Legros took a hand in the game that he and his daughter were playing together! He chose his time well, one day when Paul had been feeling particularly lonely, when Francine had been particularly charming, and the house in the woods more empty and desolate than usual.

The innkeeper told Paul bluntly that he was not treating his daughter fairly! That he might as well know it, she had always been in love with him, and he had paid her much marked attention before he went away and met Taliseh; yet when he returned, married, Francine buried that love, and loyally gave him and his wife and child friendship, generosity, kindness pressed down and running over. She had done her best to save the life of his wife, she was doing her best to mother his little boy, despite the obvious jealousy of the nurse—ah, cunning, this

dig at Mère Bionnet!—and was his constant helper and companion, in the teeth of much local disapproval, which did not approve of an unmarried woman going about so much with a man to whom she was not betrothed. Did Paul think it altogether fair of him to let a woman still young and attractive lavish her life upon him without reward? If he had no feeling for her at all, well then, he should keep away—leave her alone and let some of the other men who found her attractive try their luck! She was now thirty-four, but still handsome and with a fair *dot*, and it was time she was settled in life. She had refused a good half-dozen offers for love of him, Paul Kynaston, and the situation was causing him, Gaspard Legros, considerable anxiety. He did not view with any pleasure the prospect of leaving his daughter unwed, unprotected, when his days drew to a finish!

Startled Paul Kynaston certainly was to find that Francine Legros had kept single for love of him all these years . . . and it is not in man's nature not to feel a faint sense of flattery! It would not be true to say that he had no feeling for her. He liked her, was even fond of her after a fashion—he was used to her, after so many years. She knew all his tastes and ways, and though she would never, he knew, mean anything to him at all in comparison with what he had felt, and always would feel, for his Taliseh—well, a man needs companionship, the boy needed a mother, and so . . .

And so . . . and so, after Taliseh had lain a bare year under the red-stemmed pine-trees, Paul Kynaston and Francine Legros were married in the little church of Beauvallet, and the village offered its congratulations in due form, showing no outward sign of its dismay and concern, and after a short honeymoon at La Fronde, at long last the innkeeper's daughter entered into possession of the pretty log house called "Beaumanoir".

But the marriage was not far advanced before each party discovered certain traits about the other that were, to put it mildly, disconcerting!

Francine had taken it for granted that once married to Paul she would find no difficulty in getting rid of both Mère Bionnet and Jacques Lorraine . . . and was astonished and angry when she found it impossible to get rid of either! When challenged to produce any solid reason why either should go, she talked lamely of insolence, of "presuming on their positions", "ignoring" her and so on—but Paul frowned and declared that if either were inclined to insolence he would have found it out during the

years they had worked for him, and that he saw no sign of what she called "presuming on their positions" or ignoring her authority!

Taliseh had got on with them perfectly, and she must learn to get on with them too.

She was making mountains out of molehills—and he was not prepared, on such vague grounds, to dismiss two excellent servants whose loyalty and devotion had been proved through eight long years. Besides her training as a nurse, which made her invaluable in case of illness, Mère Bionnet had developed into a first-class cook and housekeeper. She ran the house like clockwork, knew all his favourite dishes, how he liked his coffee and how to make his bed, and looked after young George like a second mother—and as for sacking Jacques, as well ask him to get rid of his own brother! Had she forgotten that Jacques had saved his life when his leg was broken—dragged him to shelter on a sledge for miles across the frozen wastes? Whether she liked him or not, he was sorry, but Jacques remained! Francine could get another maid, a personal maid if she liked. With the amount of smart new clothes she had purchased on their honeymoon at La Fronde—though he could not imagine where she was going to wear them all—quite probably she needed one. But these two servants, foundation-stones, as it were, of the house on the plateau, were his concern—and they must stay.

Baffled and furious, Francine retreated. It was no part of her policy to quarrel openly with her husband, at least in so early a stage of marriage—but taking him at his word, she engaged a maid, one Adèle Pignon, a smart young Frenchwoman from La Fronde, who found Beauvallet so primitive that she alluded to it with a superior sniff as "*un trou sauvage*" and only stayed on at "Beaumanoir" because of the very handsome wages she earned. After wasting a considerable time in trying to work up a flirtation with the dour Jacques, Mlle. Pignon abandoned it as hopeless, and bent her energies towards flattering and toadying her mistress—which was not so difficult as it seemed, as despite her innate shrewdness, between her heady sense of success in gaining the man she wanted and the triumph of ruling where her rival had ruled, Francine was less sane and cool-headed than usual!

The new maid had no intention of staying longer than she could help at "Beaumanoir". It was not difficult to see that her handsome new mistress was already hankering to spread her

wings and fly to a wider sky than that provided by little Beauvallet—and as this suited Mlle. Pignon's plans to a T, she lost no time in getting to work on it. The brief two-week honeymoon in La Fronde had reawakened Francine's appetite for the world of fashion, for a life where dressing for dinner every night, going to theatres and operas, racing and sightseeing, dancing and gambling, dining in restaurants, was the custom—and the French girl saw to it that that appetite was daily whetted.

The lovely frocks, furs, hats, *lingerie* bought at La Fronde were tried on over and over again, to the accompaniment of exclamations of admiration from Adèle—and indeed, flushed, handsome, stately, it was no exaggeration when the French girl declared that her mistress was "*une reine, si belle . . . mais magnifique!*" What waste of beauty, of *chic* . . . why, there was nobody in all this *sale trou* to appreciate Madame! It was a sin and a shame to keep her buried here, just at the best time of her life! Dressed like that—in the silver moiré with the crimson roses and the crimson velvet wrap to match, or in the green crêpe with the jade green feathers, or the gold brocade, or the rose-coloured satin . . . why Madame would cause a sensation anywhere! On her honeymoon, at the big hotel in La Fronde, everybody must have looked and stared and thought her a Duchess at least—why did not Monsieur take Madame out into the world, to New York, to Paris, to London, where great parties were given and all sorts of smart and famous people could be met? Madame should go to Europe—to Italy, to the south of France, where there were Casinos where smart people gambled and drank and sat up all night, and where beauty, elegance and wealth such as Madame's would be suitably appreciated. . . .

And turning and posing before the long cheval-glass in her room—a recent purchase from La Fronde, a thing at which innocent Taliseh, who scarcely knew the use of a mirror, would have opened her dark eyes wide—Francine scowled, restless and angry, and though she knew the French girl flattered her for her own purposes, she knew also that both their purposes were essentially the same! She had wanted Paul Kynaston, and at long last she had got him. But a few months of matrimonial life had sated her passion—and moreover, she could not but know, though the knowledge galled her vanity shrewdly, that though her glowing animalism had awakened a brief response in him, it was purely a passing wave of physical desire without a spark of true love to keep it alive, and so soon past and over. For a few

months she had thoroughly enjoyed occupying Taliseh's place at "Beaumanoir", ordering her servants about, driving out in her sleigh, sleeping in her bed, flaunting her triumph in the faces of the villagers—but now she was as bored with the house on the plateau as she was with her husband. Yet more imperiously than ever she wanted the things he stood for!

She longed to get her hands on some of his wealth, which was accumulating far more rapidly than he could spend it—for though he had done much for little Beauvallet, built a library and a new schoolhouse, where young George went daily to learn the rudiments of knowledge, though he had harnessed the power of the wild river to furnish electricity for light and heat, and installed many other improvements, Paul Kynaston, a man of simple tastes, did not spend a tenth of his yearly income, and was rapidly becoming extremely wealthy. And Francine, itching to travel, to spend money, to see and be seen, to become Somebody in the world of international fashion, grew more and more exasperated as the days passed on and she knew herself growing no younger, and that unless she could force, persuade or somehow coerce her husband into uprooting himself, there stretched before her nothing but a long, monotonous life at Beauvallet, where she had already spent so many years. . . .

So there started a bitter tug-of-war between the two, pull-devil, pull-baker, and for a long time nobody knew how it would end! Francine started, diplomatically enough, dropping hints that young George had never seen any life outside Beauvallet, had no friends but the village children or those of the scattered settlers along the valley, and was it fair to him, since he would inherit so much, to bring him up in so limited a community? And there was the question of school. For the moment, since he was only six or seven years old, perhaps the village school sufficed . . . but again, was it fair to him? Wouldn't it be better perhaps to let "Beaumanoir" . . . if only for a few months, perhaps, or a year . . . and take a flat in New York where George could go to a first-class school, and they could do a little entertaining and make some worthwhile friends?

When she had first mooted the idea, Paul had thrown her a startled and faintly suspicious glance, and replied rather curtly that he had already considered the future of George's schooling. The new teacher at Beauvallet, who had—to the old man's great relief—released old Father Letellier, was admirably equipped to teach children up to ten years old, and when George was ten

he planned to send him to a preparatory school in La Fronde; later on he would go to boarding-school in some Canadian educational centre—just which, he had not decided. He himself intended to spend the rest of his life in Canada, and George was Canadian-born, and was to be brought up as a Canadian citizen with Canadian tastes and outlook—which he would certainly *not* be if he went to school in New York! And what was this idea of letting “Beaumanoir” and taking a flat in New York? That was unthinkable! He, Paul, had always hated towns and loathed entertaining, as heartily as he loathed fashionable life and people—and what did she mean by “making some worthwhile friends”? Go where she would, she would make no better and stauncher friends than they already had in the valley—the Jules of River Bend, Estéphe Godalbon and his wife, the Becques, the Rebondins, the Lombards and the de Tremonilles at La Fronde. . . .

If she had a hankering to go into Society, he was sorry, but she must drop any such idea at once . . . he had had his fill in his young days of so-called civilization, and had neither desire nor intention of returning to it! Now and then, if she liked, he had no objection to taking her away, say, to Montreal or even Toronto, for a while, especially when he had business there to attend to—for by now Paul Kynaston’s extensive property-holdings entailed considerable business concerning the development of those holdings—but with that, she must rest content! Dismayed and surprised at his decisive attitude, Francine again retreated for the moment, but after a while, confident in her charms, her adroitness, her knowledge of him, she returned to the attack, only to be rebuffed again and yet again. For a considerable time she tried comparatively gentle methods, coaxing, pouting, pleading, but when at last she was forced to realize that on this point, so vital to her, easy-going Paul Kynaston was not to be moved, she lost her temper and turned on him like a fury!

If he had ever really believed that she married him in order to remain buried at “Beaumanoir” he must have been mad—or vastly more vain than she dreamt, to think that his company alone, day in day out, would suffice her! She knew how rich he was—all but a millionaire—and could he not see that it was her *right*, as his wife, to go out into the world, to meet and entertain famous people, to be headlined in the papers, photographed, written up, all the rest? What was the matter with him, that he wanted to spend the rest of his life buried in the wilds? Had he

done something of which he was ashamed, so that he dared not return to civilization? Were the police after him? *Mon Dieu*, she believed they were, and that he had been fleeing from justice when he first arrived in Beauvallet. . . . Startled beyond measure at the sudden unveiling of the true nature of the woman he had married, Paul Kynaston listened in an icy, cold-eyed silence, and when at last, exhausted, she subsided, he rose without a word and left the room.

Thereafter the breach between them was complete. Twice during the week following the degrading scene just described, the mistress of "Beaumanoir" vanished in the direction of the village and took counsel with her old father at "La Tête Coupée", and in later days Jacques Lorraine recalled that she returned from her last trip to the inn carrying a small packet in one hand, and on her dark face, that had been sullen and overcast as a thunderous day since her quarrel with Paul, there was the beginning of a faint smile. A smile of malicious satisfaction . . . almost of triumph. . . .

And within a matter of days another blow fell—a blow that hit Jacques Lorraine more bitterly than can well be told! For Paul Kynaston, strong, handsome, vital, as yet only thirty-eight, and good, one would have said, for at least thirty more years of healthy life, was killed from a fall from his horse, which bolted with him one day when he was out riding over some newly-purchased land at the further end of the valley.

Needless to say, the tragic death of the English settler who had done so much for Beauvallet caused a thrill of horror and consternation to resound through the whole district, and when Paul was laid beside the body of Taliseh under the pines behind the house he had built for her so lovingly, a weeping *cortège* many hundreds long followed him to his last resting-place, and many were the dark looks cast at his handsome widow, in her trailing black veils, leaning on the arm of her father. Many were the whispers that followed her, for the breach between the two was well known throughout the valley, as was the reason for it—and it was whispered that the death of Paul Kynaston was no more due to natural reasons than had been the death of his first wife. Nobody had ever known his horse, Brown Ben, to bolt! He had carried his master safely for four years, knew the country around well, and was as sure on his feet as a goat on a mountain path. But *something* had happened during that solitary ride to cause him to throw his rider and go pelting hell-for-leather across

country until he stopped from sheer exhaustion, and was led home at last by a stray Indian, shaking in every limb and still streaked with patches of the foam that had flown from his slaving mouth.

Like the rest of the villagers, Jacques Lorraine had his suspicions, and these were connected with Francine's recent visits to her cunning old father and her return with that small packet in her hand—which suspicions were increased by the discovery, when he unsaddled Brown Ben and wiped him down, of a small patch of skin just under the saddle from which the hair had apparently been burnt or torn off so that the skin was exposed, raw and red, almost bleeding. Jacques doctored the sore place and said nothing about it to anybody—for what could be proved by that? It *might* have been a saddle-gall, a sting from a gadfly that had "boiled" and gone septic—though he did not think it was either of these things. So he placed his suspicions alongside those earlier suspicions concerning the death of Paul Kynaston's first wife—and what they added up to made him seriously anxious.

For several nights he sat up talking earnestly with Mère Bionnet, and thereafter both guarded George like a pair of lynxes, so that he was never left alone with his stepmother. For if (they reasoned) these dark fears were true, and Francine Legros had somehow managed to do away with these two, her contemporaries, who both stood between her and full control of Paul Kynaston's money, what might she not do with the child now left alone on her hands—a child who would be a nuisance and a responsibility, besides costing money to clothe and feed and educate?

On the excuse of taking young George to have his teeth attended to, Jacques took the little boy into La Fronde the day after the funeral, and once there, telephoned to say that the child had developed a rash that might be infectious, so he, Jacques, had thought it better to keep him in the town, at the house of a friend of his until the matter was cleared up. As Francine was as nervous of infection as a cat of rain, and was likewise intent upon the clearing up of her husband's estate, she agreed at once, and the man and the boy spent a happy week in the picturesque port staying at a homely but comfortable little tavern facing the sea, run by a motherly woman who adored young George and fed and petted him as though he was one of her own four sailor sons returned from the sea.

Jacques was in daily telephone communication with Mère Bionnet at the house on the plateau, and what he heard at last sent his spirits soaring high with satisfaction—now he could return to “Beaumanoir”, return safely with the boy, knowing that no danger awaited him! The tigress’s claws were cut! For Paul Kynaston had made a will only a few weeks before his death, and lodged it safely in the care of a solicitor at La Fronde—a will that cancelled completely the arrangements made in a previous will, made shortly after his second marriage! It seemed possible that some at least of the suspicions that had assailed Jacques Lorraine were shared by his employer . . . for while the first will had left, with the exception of a few legacies, Paul Kynaston’s entire estate to his wife, the second left everything to his son. Certainly in the second will Francine had been left well provided for by way of income “as long as she remains unmarried and as long as she continues to play the part of an affectionate mother to my son”. But she could not touch any portion of her husband’s capital, which was left, like the property of “Beaumanoir”, the lands in the valley and at La Fronde, also a very considerable capital sum, already invested, intact for young George to inherit. When George reached the age of twenty-one he would be at liberty to sell out his inheritance, in part or in whole, if he liked—but not until then.

If George died before reaching that age, the property was to be handed over as a Trust to the Canadian Government, minus the money already set aside as life-income for his stepmother . . . but if he decided, on attaining the age of twenty-one, to sell out, a large percentage of the resultant sum was to be handed over to Mrs. Kynaston as her own to use as she chose, quite apart from her own income already settled upon her. So whatever designs Francine Kynaston might have entertained regarding her little stepson’s life, they were neatly and completely thwarted! For her own greed’s sake she must keep him alive. . . .

On hearing this news, Jacques returned to “Beaumanoir” with all speed and listened greedily to Mère Bionnet’s trenchant description of her mistress’s rage and chagrin when she discovered the existence of a second will.

It had taken place at a conference with the solicitor, M. Médard from La Fronde, in whose hands Kynaston had left the care of all his affairs—those present had been Francine Kynaston and her father, the solicitor and his clerk, plus three others to whom legacies had been left: Estéphe Godalbon, a quiet, level-

headed man of about forty, who for several years had been Paul Kynaston's steward or manager of his properties, and Mère Bionnet, who represented both herself and the absent Jacques.

Francine had taken a very high hand at the beginning of the interview. Sure of her position, of her wealth and her power, she had merely nodded haughtily to M. Médard, and ignored his clerk altogether, as she ignored Godalbon and Mère Bionnet. She had evidently concluded the conference a mere formality, and had produced the first will—which, ever since the signing of it, she had kept securely locked up in her own possession—with an air of one who endures with resignation the last few tiresome formalities of the Coronation before taking over the Crown and all it means. Her face, when M. Médard with a dry "One moment, Madame! I hold a later will than that!" drew out the folded paper from his despatch-box, was a study! The rich olive colour, stained on each cheek with carnation, that was one of her chief beauties, vanished in a flash, and it was suddenly a grey, faded, middle-aged woman who glared, speechless, at the lawyer as slowly, emphatically, he read out the new will. . . . There was a terrible silence as he finished, and then she let fly! Stormed and raved like a fury, shrieking that she had been shelved, deceived, thrust on one side for a brat that was not even her own . . . she would have satisfaction, she would get the will upset, her husband must have been mad, or someone must have influenced him against her . . . she would not endure such a position, living at the whim and favour of a child when, as Paul's wife, full control of his fortune should have been hers! And so on and so forth, livid, beside herself, while Mère Bionnet avidly drank it all in, and M. Médard stared, shocked and amazed, and Godalbon listened with his eyes cast down until at last old Legros, who had sat rigid, evidently at first as thunderstruck as his daughter, pulled himself together, touched his daughter on the arm, and instantly she was silent.

The conference ended awkwardly, with M. Médard and M. Godalbon taking a constrained leave of a darkly-silent woman, and Mère Bionnet slipping away to her own quarters. For long thereafter the father and daughter remained together talking in low tones, so low that though Mère Bionnet did her experienced best to catch something of what was taking place, she could hear nothing but the low rumble of old Gaspard's deep voice, broken now and then by the brief, sullen murmurs of his daughter's replies. . . .

The following day Francine Kynaston went over to La Fronde to try and find some way, possibly via another solicitor, of having her husband's will upset, set aside or altered somehow in her favour. But Paul Kynaston was a shrewd business man, and had employed another shrewd one to guard his son's interests—and from the dark surliness of Mrs. Kynaston's face when she returned it was plain that she had met with no success. The situation must needs be accepted! But that acceptance of it was a truly bitter pill was plain, and she went about silent and thunderous, giving vent to such temper and tantrums that it was not without qualms that Jacques brought the boy home! That young George was secure from any physical danger he knew, since his stepmother's comfort in life now depended upon his well-being. But there are more ways than one of making a child unhappy, and the prospect of Francine Legros' wreaking subtle vengeance on the son of the man who had spiked her guns so neatly could not be overlooked . . . but to the trapper's astonishment, Francine received her stepson not only amiably but almost with open arms, and it soon became plain that she intended changing her tactics towards him altogether!

Since her marriage with Paul she had ignored him more or less completely—except when she was annoyed with him, when, unless his father was by, she gave him a very rough side of her tongue! So that George showed considerable surprise at this new interest in him, and responded to it, being a nice, well-brought-up little boy, with gravely-polite gratitude, though he never, then or any other time, showed any sign of real liking for his stepmother. It was as though some wary inner instinct kept him at a distance from her, woo she never so ardently . . . but very soon after his return it became plain that whatever his attitude to her, Francine Kynaston was determined that hers to him should be from now onward that of the fond, if not positively doting parent!

George was consulted upon all manner of things, his tastes studied, his whims and fancies pandered to. His favourite dishes appeared constantly at table, his pony got the new saddle he needed, a colourful tartan mackinaw that he had hankered for for months at Kaka Cahouet's Clothing Store in the village was bought and pressed upon him; when he mentioned that he wanted a new canoe, it was promptly ordered from the best shop in La Fronde, and altogether such a new and unexpected fuss made of the boy that he was plainly puzzled, though gratified, and sardoni-

cally Mère Bionnet and Jacques looked on and understood. Since Francine's future largely depended on the boy, he must be placated—pleased, spoilt, taught to rely on her for everything, brought so completely under her influence that he could be swayed anyway she chose! Given in to in all minor things, in the hope that thus she might get her own way in greater . . . and first and foremost, he must be broken of his passion for Canada! He must be taken away from "Beaumanoir", from the village, the mountains, the river that he loved, weaned from the land that had given him birth . . . and the woman's first move was an astute one enough. To persuade both the boy and the lawyer that he must be put to school at once—and in her opinion, to a better school than any that La Fronde could offer. He should go to Montreal at least, possibly even to Toronto . . . or New York.

George himself was willing enough to go. Change, adventure, travel, all have their appeal to your boy, and grudgingly M. Médard admitted that Madame was right in pointing out that a boy who was to inherit such large estates and responsibilities as George should be well and carefully educated. Paul himself had only intended to send his son to La Fronde for a year or two, and if, as Mrs. Kynaston declared, she had friends in New York who were urging her to bring the boy there to school at once, why, there was certainly a wide choice of first-class schools there—and provided Mrs. Kynaston kept within the terms of the will, she was at liberty to direct the training and education of her husband's son.

So the arrangements with La Fronde were cancelled, and the household at "Beaumanoir" plunged into a frenzy of packing and preparation, mainly directed by Adèle Pignon, enchanted at the prospect of going to New York; her mistress, dark-browed and preoccupied, spent much time with her father; and Mère Bionnet and Jacques Lorraine, both deeply depressed at the prospect of losing the boy they so dearly loved, ranged themselves together at the side of young George, who, now the preparations for his departure from Beauvallet were well under way, found himself surprisingly reluctant to go—an attitude of mind that irritated his stepmother sometimes almost to the point of losing her temper with him, though these days she was careful not to do that! Nothing but Francine's most charming and gracious side was to be shown to the boy in whose hands lay so much of her future. . . .

Now and then she would argue with him, point out what an exciting thing it would be to see the world as he was going to do. What a thrilling life he would have at school, how many friends he would make . . . how he would be able to play real baseball on a proper ground, instead of a makeshift game played on the village square with Indian-made bat and ball—and how he would see real shows, shows such as he had never seen before! Circuses, with wild animals and clowns and tight-wire walkers, theatres with dancing and singing, huge shops and crowded streets, and later on, a car of his own to drive. . . . Ordinarily he listened to her in polite silence, making little comment, but at last one day during their midday meal, when she had been at particular pains to describe the wonderful future that lay before him, once they had left Beauvallet, he looked steadily at her and remarked quietly:

“But, Francine, these are all things *you* specially like to do, not me!”

When Mère Bionnet, who overheard the conversation via the serving-hatch between kitchen and dining-room—a singularly convenient invention for eavesdroppers—reported this remark to Jacques, she added the comment that her mistress had been so thunderstruck that for a full moment she said nothing! Simply sat staring fixedly at him as he went on, diffidently, with the shyness of the silent child forcing himself to speak, yet with a certain stubborn determination showing through the diffidence.

“I know my father would like me to go to a big school and learn all I can, so that when I am a man I shall know how to run this place and all the rest just like he used to run it, the way he would have liked.” His candid blue eyes faced her courageously. “You know, Francine, though I know you don’t like living here, I *do*—and when I’m grown up and I’ve learnt all I have to, I shall want to come back and live here, even if you don’t? I shall *always* love this place. Even if I’m away from it an awfully long time, I shall want to come back to it in the end.”

He ceased. It was a long speech for a small boy to make, particularly under the fire of the burning dark eyes fixed on him from the further side of the table, and when the woman’s reply came it was trenchant with the contempt that a child finds the hardest thing of all to bear.

“Always . . . what rubbish you are talking! You don’t know anything about life, about the world outside, about what you are

going to like or want to do in ten years' time, let alone when you are twenty-one! You're only seven years old, Georgie, and you're talking nonsense."

But the boy was persistent. Flushed and troubled, he stared doggedly back into her smouldering eyes.

"I *do* know! I shall always remember this house and the valley and . . . and everything," he maintained. "And I shall *want* to come back and live here always, when I'm a man!"

There was silence in the room for one moment, and Mère Bionnet, peeping through the crack in the hatch, thought, from the black look on Francine's face, that she was about to burst into one of her blind rages . . . but she was wrong. The woman stared at the little boy for a full minute, then with a curious smile that was in a way more alarming even than an outburst of rage, rose and pushed back her chair.

"Well, well," she commented. "If you are going through life dreaming about Beauvallet and hankering to get back to it, you are not likely to get on very well or very fast with your studies. We shall have to see what can be done about it . . . I think!"

What did she mean by that oblique hint? Mère Bionnet and Jacques, seriously disturbed, analysed the phrase from every angle, but failed to come to any decision . . . but the conversation nevertheless forced Jacques Lorraine to a definite decision of his own.

It seemed plain that Francine Legros was planning some move—though what, he did not know—to weaken, if not blot out completely from the memory of the little boy who, in a few days now, would be utterly in her hands, all thoughts of Canada, of his birthplace, of his father even, if she could! Her purpose was plain to see—the gaining of the large capital sum that would be, if they were sold, her share of the price of the "Beaumanoir" properties. It seemed a long way ahead to be looking, but Francine Legros, having waited nine years to get only a part of her way, was quite prepared to wait another long spell of years to gain it completely in the end. Did George decide, on reaching his majority, to sell out his Canadian inheritance, her share, plus the income that Paul Kynaston had already settled on her, would make her an extremely wealthy woman—so by fair means or foul, somehow George must be made to sell!

Of any normal woman one would have said, "Surely she might well be content with things as they are?"

Her own income was hers for life, and was for her own personal spending; all bills for George's education, clothing, doctoring, etc., were paid by M. Médard, and the solicitor was, besides, empowered to provide her with ample funds with which to settle all expenses connected with living, travelling, etc., until the boy reached his majority. While George was at boarding-school there was nothing to prevent her travelling, entertaining, visiting, going anywhere she chose, as long as she had him with her for his holidays—Paul Kynaston was in no mind to allow his widow to shelve her responsibilities upon the shoulders of some tutor or governess! Truly a normal woman should have been more content—but all that Francine Legros had already gained had merely whetted her appetite for more. Fiercely she concentrated all her energies now towards gaining one end—the persuasion, by fair means or foul, of her stepson, when he reached the age of twenty-one, into selling his magnificent inheritance. Then—then Francine would be free, and wealthy beyond her wildest dreams. The attainment of that end had become an obsession . . . and the first step was to leave Beauvallet.

Yet there were many things to do and many arrangements to be made before Beauvallet could be left. . . . Francine was far too shrewd a woman to leave a first-class property to "just anybody" to look after.

If the place and its lands were to fetch the price they should in a few years' time, they must be well maintained . . . and though it went sorely against the grain to keep on employing people whom she heartily disliked, grudgingly she had to admit that she could not do better than retain Mère Bionnet and Jacques to look after "Beaumanoir", while Estéphe Godalbon continued to manage the estate. Francine, ever money-greedy, had toyed with the idea of letting "Beaumanoir", but on Estéphe's earnest plea had abandoned the notion, as the only chance, the steward had pointed out, for a good "let" would be during the summer months, to a bunch of young and probably riotous people who would scare all the game for miles round and inevitably knock the beds, furniture, china, rugs, and so on about! So "Beaumanoir" was to be left to await its fate when its young owner should be twenty-one—and indeed it stood empty, but for its two faithful servitors, for the full fourteen years that were to elapse between George's departure and his majority. True, as though to hearten himself as the packing proceeded, and to smother the depression that was now riding him, George spoke often of

returning to the house he loved for visits, for his holidays and so on, and when he spoke of it his stepmother glanced at him with a faint, oblique smile, but said nothing. . . .

It was one day when he was out fishing with the boy that Jacques Lorraine took a sudden decision—a decision that involved the use of magic. Though in his young days, among the Seminole Indians, whose blood he shared, such rites as the trapper proposed to use had been taken for granted, yet his later years, spent travelling and working among whites, had to a large extent weakened his belief in the old native magic, and it was long since he had dabbled in it. Yet such things keep their hold in a strange way! Though buried deep under later, alien, influences, at a moment of stress they have a strange habit of shaking them off, as a dog, wet from a swim, shakes water from his coat, and stand forth again, as strong and formidable as ever . . . and as he sat watching the bobbing of his float in the swift current of the river below their perch on the high bank, Jacques Lorraine knew that for him that moment had come. Some inner knowledge told him—had been telling him for weeks, though he had hesitated to accept it—that the woman in whose hands young George had been left would succeed, unless she was prevented, in breaking the link that bound the lad to his country and his people—and if she succeeded he would be wax, helpless in her hands. He must be bound to Canada with a bond that nothing could break. And he, Jacques Lorraine, knew how to make that bond. . . .

“See here, *mon gars*,” he said, and his voice was tender. “We must talk a little, you and I, and not feesh any more. All right?”

George glanced at him with a little surprise, but began to reel in his rod.

“O.K.,” he said. “We’ve got plenty, anyway—so many that I think we’d better call at the Jules’ on the way back, don’t you think, and leave half a dozen for Madame Jules. She’s just had another baby, and she likes trout . . . and I guess old Jules doesn’t have much time to go fishing. . . .”

Like his father, full of thought for others, for his people of the valley, thought Jacques, and his heart swelled with sorrow to think of how far away, a bare week hence, would be this child of his friend, and of the woman he had loved, from his humble distance, as silently and devotedly as any knight of old his lady.

He sat back, strung Jules’s bunch of fish on a line of gut, laid down his rod and began to speak.

"Well now, we most talk as two men talk who are friends togezer—and that means no saying to anybody, especially to no woman, about what we talk of. *Compriz?*"

George nodded understandingly.

"Of course! Father taught me that. What men talk of is between themselves only—women are different," he repeated. "But anyway, Jacques, you know I wouldn't talk of anything you say to me—especially not to Francine. You meant specially not talk to Francine, didn't you?"

Jacques nodded sombrely, and paused a little. It was going to be difficult to say what he had to say without hinting or suggesting something disloyal to the woman who was Paul's widow—but somehow it had to be done.

"Yes," he said at last. "When I say zat I mean not anyzing rude or unfair to Madame, *tu sais?* But . . . in some zings she see not in ze same way zat your father saw, and as I know he would wish you to see zem. And so . . ." he paused, rather at a loss, but surprisingly George finished the sentence for him.

"You mean about me not wanting to leave Canada?" he said—more as a statement than as a question. "And Francine wanting to. But of course, Jacques, I've known for ever so long now that Francine wanted to get rid of this place and go to be a sort of society queen—meet fine people in fashionable places like Paris and London and all that." His small nose curled in an expression of puzzled disdain that was all his father over again. "I can't understand it! But I used to hear them—Father and Francine—quarrelling over it often and often, 'specially the last six months before Father died. Father used to go out and stamp away into the woods or shut himself into his study, and once or twice I've seen him put his head in his hands and groan as if he really couldn't bear it any more!" The honest young face was troubled. "Father told me always to be loyal to Francine, 'cos she is my stepmother—but *first* I must be loyal to Father and to my own mother, mustn't I? *They* wanted me to have this place after they died, and to live here when I was a man . . . and I know that Francine means not to let me come back here if she can help it. But I *am* coming back . . . I am, I *am*, as soon as I'm a man and can choose for myself! Even if she keeps me away on the other side of the world at all sorts of schools, and won't let me come back until I'm twenty-one, I shall come back then."

The valiant declaration of youthful faith brought a lump into Jacques' throat so that he blinked and coughed, realizing that the boy's words had strengthened his decision, emphasized his own inner sense of its rightness. . . .

"*Merci, mon petit*—that makes me feel I am right in what I ask you to do. You belong to Canada—you want make pact wit' Canada so that no matter where you go you must some day come back to Canada?" His intent dark eyes bored into the innocent blue ones raised to his.

"Oh yes!" The little boy's voice was eager, emphatic. "Oh yes, Jacques—please, I want to make a what-you-call-it—a pact. So that I can't break it even if I want to. . . ."

Jacques nodded, and rising to his feet without a word, led the way up into the woods that rose behind where they had been sitting, on the brink of the river . . . only a bare half-mile away, in point of fact, from the place where Taliseh had met her tragic death. Together, the weatherbeaten man of forty and the sturdy child of seven climbed the rough mountain-side, climbing over roots and forcing their way through brushwood until they reached a shallow little dell, where a group of slender young trees, birch, pine and larches, were growing together.

Jacques had already marked this group and hidden close beside them certain matters he knew would be needed, and now he stooped down, and moving a stone aside drew out a leather-wrapped packet. Out of it he brought two things at which the boy's eyes widened, though, used to the woodman's law of silence, he said no word. They were a bright new hunting-knife and an Indian war-belt made of wampum and trimmed with beads. Sombrely the trapper looked down at the child beside him.

"You got to do all I say, *mon enfant*," he said. "And I warn you before I start, it will hurt, an' you mus' not cry—you mus' bite your lips hard and make no sound. Like the brave who wore zis belt, you mus' be brave—and the pain will pass. And when it has passed and you hav' not flinch' nor cried out—zen you will be blood-kin wit' ze Trees, and nozing can ever break zat kinship. . . ."

George nodded. His eyes were fast on his old friend.

"I see," he said. "I *will* be brave—I promise."

Jacques nodded.

"*Bon!*" was all he said, and then he stepped to one of the trees, a slender pine sapling whose trunk was yet scarcely larger

round than a lady's arm, and he took the new hunting-knife and with it cut from the tree-stem a long ribbon of bark—and left it hanging from the end still attached to the trunk. Then he beckoned the boy to come near and roll up one sleeve, and with the same knife he cut a little gash in the brown young forearm, just below the curve of the elbow, so that the bright blood welled out—and he nodded, well pleased, as no sound came from young George, only a faint frown and a determined tightening of the lips. Then he wound the sliver of bark round the boy's arm and pressed the raw wound upon the arm to the raw wound upon the tree, and bound them together with the wampum belt, and as he bound them he muttered strange words, and the sweat beaded on his forehead, for he was calling upon forces both strong and strange . . . also, it was long since he had used his mother's old magic, and he feared lest he might forget or overlook some essential part in the rite he was working, so that when all was done he turned aside and dropped to a stone near by, burying his head in his hands, his heart thumping, his mouth dry, for now the supreme test was come! Would the boy cry out in the pain that must come, as swiftly the bitter sap mingled with his young blood, coursing down his arm and into his body, binding him eternally to the Brotherhood of the Trees? If he failed and cried out . . . then the woods would have none of him! In the ruthless scheme of Nature all things too weak go to the wall, so in the same way, the Trees will have no weaklings linked to them. Young George must show his worth. . . .

The tense minutes passed, but there was no sound. . . . At last Jacques ventured to glance round, and he leapt to his feet in joy and thankfulness, for the boy, though his face was drawn with pain, his eyes glazed with hard-held tears, his lips grimly set, was standing unmoved, his free arm wrapped close about the slender tree to which his other arm was bound. . . . With a swelling heart the trapper sprang to his feet. All was well! Taliseh's heritage of dogged Indian blood, of courage that could face even death unflinching and in silence, had served her son bravely. . . .

With swift fingers Jacques released the boy from his bondage, and as he fell forward, half-fainting, in his arms, pulled out the flask of brandy he always kept handy in case of emergencies. The ordeal had been harsh—in his young days Jacques had himself been made one of the Brotherhood of the Trees, and the sharp grinding pain of it had never quite faded from his memory

—but within three minutes young George was sitting smiling with triumph, white-faced but a conqueror, eyeing the red wound on his arm with awe and pride. All was well . . . and as the French-Canadian led the way down the mountain-slope to where they had left their rods, his heart was full of joy. Now come what may, the boy belonged to Canada! Nothing could alter that.

His voice rose on the air, rejoicing, and young George's shrill gay young tones joined in—

*"Pour aller voir tous nos parents,
Mes chers amis, le cœur content!*

Envoyons d'l'avant!

Nos gens

Envoyons d'l'avant!"

"But in that case," said Pennoyer, "how does it come about that George now has no feeling for Canada at all?"

"Eh zat," came the voice . . . and it struck me that it sounded tired, and no wonder, for the dawn was beginning to shine red in the east. So utterly absorbed had we been in the tale that the time had flown without our realizing it. "Ah, zat was *her* doing—Francine. Yes. She took my leetle boy, only two-t'ree day afterwards, and she make a hypnotic . . . what you call it? . . . over heem. Ver' clever, and if I had not use' ze tree-magic, Francine, zat *chameau*, zat *sorcière*, would 'ave won! Gaspard, *le vieux diable*, he come to help, and ze leetle one tell me zat zey make him look into a beeg glass ball, and Francine make motions in ze air over him—and zen he don't remember no more, at all. I guess zat when he sleep zey tell him to forget everyt'ing about Canada when he leave Beauvallet. . . . Gaspard ver' clever ol' Indian chief, he teach his daughter well how to do hypnotics. *Mais oui!* But I don' worry, because I know zat *my* magic stronger in the end zan his! An' so it is, bekoss when George begin to grow up an' he don' come back to his place, to his people, his Brozers ze Trees begin to 'call' him, you see—zat red scar flame up! And as he grow older it flame up oftener and more often, and he begin to get bozzered and come to you. And so . . . so you know all."

"I take it," said Pennoyer, "that this sleep-walking business is connected with the scar. I see he is sleeping underneath a group of pine and birch trees."

"Of course!" said the voice. "When he kom here to zees good house, so close to nature, ze blood in him zat belong to ze trees call loud and strong to its brozers out here! And when his conscious mind it sleep, his *real* mind took command an' brought heem to rest here . . . it is what you call a homing instinc', like a pigeon. Francine, she keep him always in towns because, alzo she does not know of zis pact, she know how strong is ze call of nature to zose who have been brought up close to her, and she fear it! But she could not prevent him to come down here when he grow to love zees young girl . . ."

"Will that make for any complication? I mean is the girl likely to dislike the idea of going to live in Canada?" asked Pennoyer.

But the voice laughed.

"Eh no! Zey lof each ozer, zose two, and she is true woman, she go where her man goes. It is destiny. Only one zing can stop it!" His voice was failing, beginning to halt and grow faint. "Eh well, I must go . . . I am an old man, me, an' I did not t'ink I could hold zis boy's body so long to talk t'rough it an' tell you all I know. Your power has helped me, *messieurs*—I zank you—and now it is for you to save my leetle one and send him back to where his heart has always belonged. But work quick, work quick!"

"Why must we be so quick?" I interjected, and had to strain to catch the voice that came in reply.

"Because soon—oh, ver' soon—he will be twenty-one, and can sell 'Beaumanoir' and all its lands, everything, and zat greedy *diable* will have won what she wants. She is a wicked woman—*ça, c'est vrai!* I left the eart' six years ago—I die of pneumonia, and my good Mère Bionnet nurse me to ze last—and when I come here I meet my friend Paul and my lady Taliseh, an' zey tell me all I suspect of Francine is true! She hit my leetle lady on ze head wit' a great wooden stake she bring, and push her into ze water, and she hide under ze saddle of Paul's horse a ball of caustic mix' wit' stinging herbs, so zat when Brown Ben begin to sweat it release ze acid and burn into ze skin until ze poor beast mad wit' pain! She must be forced to confess—forced to lift ze spell she lay, so zees soul she has held prisoner for all zese years can be free, and can know itself and where it truly belong! *Allez vite, messieurs . . . vite! Au'voir.*"

The voice faded and died, the head of the boy turned wearily,

and he seemed to relapse into sleep, and Pennoyer and I looked at each other. Through the heavy green of the woodland around us the rosy fingers of the dawnlight were piercing, showing thickets of hazel, of thorn and bramble, wildrose and foxglove, and soaring aloft, like great grave columns, the stems of oak and ash and chestnut, larch and pine. . . .

As we tramped wearily back through the dew-soaked meadow towards the Hall gardens, I longed to ask questions, many and various, but Pennoyer's face was drawn with fatigue and I refrained . . . yet as we mounted the terrace, as I might have anticipated, he answered at least two outstanding ones.

"He'll probably sleep for half an hour or so to recover from the weariness of his mediumship—and then he'll return as he has done before, asleep, not knowing what has been happening. And regarding what I'm going to do to force that woman to confess . . . now I know the background of her story, that's easy! You wait and see!"

We slept late the following day, and when we finally got downstairs we heard that Mrs. Kynaston was having a talk to the Viscount in his study and the young people were all out somewhere playing golf, so we drifted out into the garden, took possession of two of a group of deck-chairs under a group of great sweeping trees beyond the tennis-courts, and sat there discussing the events of the previous night. But before we had got very far we saw the lean, stooping figure of old Endean come through the arch in the yew hedge—his face lightened when he saw us and he quickened his footsteps.

"Ah—just the fellows I was looking for," he said with satisfaction, as he sank into a third deck-chair. "I heard from Bentley—who sat up all last night, such was his devotion!—that you got back about three o'clock and George about an hour later, when he went straight to bed as before. I knew you'd be tired out, so wouldn't let anybody wake you. I was just hanging about wondering when you'd be appearing, when Mrs. Kynaston came down and immediately tackled me about—what do you think?—about wanting to leave here and go back to town!"

Pennoyer elevated his eyebrows.

"Oh?" was his comment. "What grounds does she give for wanting to go? I thought they'd only been here a day or two?"

"That's all," said Endean. "And she doesn't give any real reason for this sudden desire to depart! Only a very lame excuse—sudden business in town on which she wants George's advice. Which is frankly a stupid thing to say, as I know for a fact that neither George nor she have had any letters at all since they came!"

"Besides," I said, "if I'm any psychologist, she has never taken George's advice about anything—*she* wears the trousers in that *ménage*!"

"She won't—when George is 'whole'—when his sleeping side wakes," said Pennoyer. "At present he's not sufficiently vital—not sufficiently decisive to want anything very strongly." He looked at Endean. "So something's happened to scare the lady!"

Endean nodded.

"*Something's* happened to panic her! She looked a shocking colour this morning, and her eyes were shifty—she's taken fright at something and wants to get back to town and take George with her. Now what do you suppose has happened?"

"I saw that Molly's report of seeing a figure that she said was Chinese—but was evidently Indian—outside George's door gave her a nasty shock last night at dinner," said Pennoyer, "and she may have smelt that 'piney' smell and connected the two together. Whether she has gone further still and connected them with this scar on George's arm—which plainly has worried her increasingly—or whether she had a further shock last night after we were all in bed, I don't know. But the Powers are moving against her, and she senses them and has taken fright. Still, she is evidently going to fight them to the last ditch, and she knows she can do that better if she had George surrounded by bricks and mortar, streets and traffic, than out here, where nature itself is arrayed against her. Now listen and I'll tell you what we've discovered—which is a great deal!"

We spent about an hour with the old man, in the scented shade of the great larch and cedar trees, and Endean listened with absorbed attention, his keen old eyes fixed on Pennoyer's face. At the end of the recital he drew a long breath of satisfaction and sat back.

"Wonderful—wonderful," he breathed. "My dear fellow, what can I say to thank you?"

"Don't thank me yet," said Pennoyer quickly. "We aren't out of the wood yet, you know, though with any luck we shall

be shortly. But you"—he studied the old man attentively—"you are glad of all this, on the whole? Don't forget that when the boy is released he will go back to Canada, where his heart belongs—and that means the loss of your daughter."

The Viscount sighed faintly.

"It would be nonsense to say that I shall not feel sad at Dolly's going so far away," he said. "But I will not be selfish, Pennoyer. The world is to the young—and the young and growing countries need them. And I'm inclined to think that the day of the large landowner in England is drawing to a close, sorry as I am in some ways to see it. Certainly, I suppose many people will say that I'm a fool to take part in any action that will prevent a very rich young man from settling in England, marrying my daughter and spending his money rebuilding my sadly-decaying estates—which, if his stepmother had her way and he sold his Canadian heritage, George would undoubtedly do! But to allow that to happen would be to join in a—a conspiracy to hold George in bondage—to agree to his remaining muffled and half-blind as, in effect, he is now. He *must* be freed and stand forth a whole man, no matter what it costs me! For all the veneer of sophistication that time and that woman's training have plastered on him, I don't believe the life of an English squire is either young George's desire nor his destiny—and I should be doing him a grave wrong to cheat him into taking up that life without realizing what he was doing. Of course, if when he is in full possession of his consciousness he *did* elect to stay here, I would be more than happy—but I will be no party to any arrangement that would coerce him into doing so without his full will and consent."

"In full possession of his consciousness he will never elect to stay in England," finished Pennoyer, not without tenderness. "I admire you for your courage and honesty, my friend. As you say, this boy's destiny, his blood and his heart belong to Canada. She has called to him through that blood all these years, and as the time approached when she might lose him, has called so imperiously, so urgently that that call has been heard . . . and is going to be answered! Just as soon as I can bring it about. . . ."

"Then Jacques Lorraine is right—it will have to be soon," said Endean. "Because though I put the woman off as well as I could, she is determined to be gone, and to drag George with her as soon as possible—and his twenty-first birthday is next

week! Unless we break this spell she had laid on him before they leave, he may slip through our hands yet, and sign away his birth-right—and then it will be too late!”

“Can’t you persuade her to stay another week?” frowned Pennoyer.

“I did my best,” said the Viscount. “I said we would be so disappointed, they had only just come down and we hadn’t really seen anything of them, but she was very insistent—and it was only when I pointed out that to-day was Saturday, and that even if they left at once, no business could be done until Monday, so they might as well remain over Sunday night, that she reluctantly agreed to stay until Monday. She’d have rushed up to London on Sunday afternoon if I hadn’t hastily invented a dinner-party for Sunday night with at least two titled people there! She’s a simply terrible snob and social climber, and that did it—she consented to stay until Monday. Though I’m afraid that old Lady Lingham and the Hay-Bentalls won’t thank me for rushing them into a last-minute party to meet a woman I’m sure they will call a half-breed!” He laughed. “How relieved I am that she isn’t George’s mother!”

“Then if to-day’s Saturday, and Sunday night’s a dinner-party, we must act to-night,” said Pennoyer. “Now, my plans are these. To-night let dinner and the evening pass off as usual, the youngsters amusing themselves and we elders playing bridge or talking. But give Lady Leila a hint to clear everybody off to bed fairly early, and tell George not to go to his room, but to slip, without anybody seeing him, into your study and lie down with a book on that divan by the Spanish-leather screen in the far corner. There’s a reading-lamp on a table at the head—he’ll be all right there till I come, tell him. Meanwhile, you detain Mrs. Kynaston behind the others in the drawing-room on one pretext or another—say to discuss possible wedding plans for the two youngsters, anything you like. Then when I send Bentley in with the words, ‘Will you be needing anything else to-night, my lord?’ bring her into your study . . . and leave the rest to me.”

It was with a heart swelling with secret excitement that I went down to dinner that evening!

Mrs. Kynaston was again gorgeously dressed, in olive-green velvet this time, embroidered with sequins, with a mink wrap and some handsome modern jewellery in heavy gold set with big

semi-precious stones—topaz, jade, chrysoprase, that sort of thing. And I had to admit that despite her clumsy bulk, her sallown skin and over-elaborate dressing, she was still a regal, impressive creature, and somehow to-night vested with an air formidable, weighty—indomitable with the indomitability of the old fighter who braces himself for a final and decisive battle.

In the midst of the laughing, joking young women round her, with their crisp frocks, their light curly hair and brittle, gay voices, she loomed like a darkly-sturdy rock in a cloud of flying sea-foam, and despite my knowledge of my friend Pennoyer's powers, I wondered whether we would really succeed in saving young George from the bondage she had laid upon him. It would be a stiff fight, I thought, and wondered what weapons my friend was going to use against her. He had been impervious to my shower of excited questions as we descended the stairs to dinner, and had merely continued smiling his enigmatic smile. . . .

I'm afraid I was absent, too excited to pull my weight as a guest during dinner-time, and in order to save myself the bother of making conversation took a hand at bridge afterwards, despite the money I knew I would lose to Mrs. Kynaston. Following Pennoyer's instructions, George withdrew early from the party on the plea of a bad headache, and vanished—I knew not up to his room, but into the Viscount's study next to the drawing-room, there to amuse himself with a book until Pennoyer and I joined him, when Lady Leila, shepherding her flock to bed, gave us the order of release. Fortunately this happened earlier than we dared hope, as Dolly, bereft of George, declared that she was tired, and Molly followed suit—they may well have been really tired, since during the day they had played two rounds of golf on a very precipitous course, and after tea followed that by three hours' hard tennis, all on a blazing June day!

Endean was sitting talking to Mrs. Kynaston as the young folk departed—we rose and followed them, and she nodded graciously as we said good night, and after loitering in the hall for a few minutes in order to allow the young fry to scatter safely to their rooms, we went into the study. Bentley, under the pretence of closing doors and windows for the night, was to await our orders in the hall.

Young George was lying asleep on the divan in the corner, the book fallen from his hand, and Pennoyer smiled approvingly.

"Come and help me put this screen round him," he said softly.

"I'm preparing a surprise for the daughter of Gaspard Legros!"

"How is George going to play any part in it if he's snoozing?" I demanded.

"I don't want—or expect *him*—to play any part at all!" said Pennoyer. "But I hope—and believe—that old Jacques Lorraine will!"

"God—of course! I *am* a fool!" I said contritely, and Pennoyer grinned.

"You are rather—at times!" he said. "But you're my very old and valued friend, old chap, and you'll have to forgive me if I pull your leg sometimes for not being quick on the uptake!"

He went round the room carefully extinguishing all the lights but one single small amber-shaded reading-lamp. I gave the signal to Bentley to take in the prearranged message, and with mingled feelings we awaited the entrance of the leading lady upon the stage we had so carefully set.

Within a few minutes the two came in through the French window from the terrace, Mrs. Kynaston's jewels, the rich colour of her dress, gleaming against the darkness of the night sky behind her as she halted a moment on the threshold and looked from one to the other of us, surprised and half-suspicious. I guessed that the Viscount had said nothing to her of our presence in the study when he had suggested going there . . . on the pretext, we afterwards discovered, of showing her some photographs of his Scottish place, to which George, did he marry Dolly and settle in England, would fall heir. As she paused, Endean slipped behind her, fastened the window and drew the heavy curtains close. She glanced at him sharply and then came slowly towards us, standing beside the small table with the shaded lamp, round which we had ranged a group of chairs.

"Ah . . . your antiquarian friends, Lord Endean!" she said—and there was the suspicion of a sneer in her voice.

We were right. She had guessed from the beginning that the antiquarian pose was—just that! A pose. . . . She sat down heavily in a padded chair facing us and tilted her chin defiantly.

"And are your antiquarian friends also eenterested in the photographs you were going to show me, eh?"

"I'm afraid . . ." began Endean diffidently, but Pennoyer, seeing the old man's embarrassment, took the situation at once into his capable hands.

"Excuse me, Madame," he said easily. "I must really save

my friend Endean the embarrassment of admitting that he persuaded you to come to his study by using a little piece of bluff! I—we—wanted a private talk to you, and it was the only way."

She eyed him steadily, and in her black eyes there was a wary glint.

"I knew you were here for no antiquary stuff!" she snapped. "But what you come for, I don't know—who are you?"

"I am a doctor—of sorts," said Pennoyer. "And I am here following an interview I had with your son concerning this mysterious scar on his arm. With your *stepson* I should say, of course—since we know that he is not your son."

She caught her breath, and for a moment her sallow skin went grey. Then she flushed darkly and her fat hands clutched the arms of her chair as she spat at him like an angry cat.

"What nonsense is thees you are talking—you must be mad! George not my son? Of *course* he ees my son—whose son should he be if he ees not mine?"

"He is the son of Paul Kynaston, your husband, by his first marriage with Taliseh, daughter of Flying Hawk, Chief of the Hurons," said Pennoyer.

But he got no further. That awful grey look swept again across her face, but she fought back the wave of terror that produced it with a furious courage that I could not but admire, and rising from her chair with a celerity amazing in one of her bulk she turned abruptly to Lord Endean.

"My lord, have you brought me here to be abused? You should be ashamed! I have nothing to say to these—these *gentlemen*—who say things so absurd, so insulting! I will not stay in thees room to listen to them! I will go to my room and stay there until I can leave your house. . . ."

It was a bold stroke, and for a moment she dominated all of us, Pennoyer, myself, Endean who, struck in his most sensitive point, courtesy to a woman under his roof, glanced appealingly at Pennoyer. But it was not to be Pennoyer who grasped this nettle—even as she turned to sweep towards the door there stole a sound across the room. The sound of a voice singing softly, almost meditatively.

"*Quand on part du chanquiers. . . .*
Mer chers amis, tous le cœur gai!
Pour aller voir tous nos parents,

Mes chers amis, le cœur content!

Envoyons d'l'avant!

Nos gens

Envoyons d'l'avant!"

Jacques! It was Jacques Lorraine, come to the help of his "leetle one", and as the voice rose, growing high and strong so that it rang through the room, the woman collapsed. Suddenly, completely, like a pricked balloon, from a confident figure defying all three of us, she crumpled into a chair, a quaking, cowering creature whose open mouth and shaking hands showed terror final and complete.

"*Jacques . . . Jacques!*" she stammered. "*Jacques . . . dead these six years past! Mon Dieu! . . .*"

And the voice answered her, mocking, triumphant.

"*Mais oui, ma belle Francine—me voilà!* It ees a surprise to hear me speak? I, a what-you-call 'dead', eh? Ha, ha—how it iss fonny to hear zat, when I am alive, alive, as moch as when I tramp ze woods of Beauvallet and teach my leetle boy to ride an' swim an' fish . . . when I serve his fazer and his lofly mozer Taliseh. *You* my leetle George's mozer . . . ha, you make me sick to hear you! *You* to have a boy lak zis boy of mine . . . never, never, it could not be! All you could do was to try and trap him—when you found it would not pay you to destroy him as you did his fazer and mozer. . . ."

The woman stiffened and set her teeth, and again a reluctant admiration gripped me. Though she was trembling with terror still, she pulled herself together in a giant effort to recover her balance, and answered in a queer, breathless voice.

"I . . . It ees a lie! I . . . I do not know where you are, how you speak or what . . . thees is a trap, a trap!"

Her hunted eyes stared wildly, furiously, from one to the other of us, and Pennoyer moved swiftly to the screen.

"It is a trap, as you say, in a sense, *Madame*," he said coldly. "But lest you imagine any nonsense about ventriloquism or gramophone records . . . if you think that this is not actually the voice of Jacques Lorraine, whom you knew at Beauvallet . . . look at this!"

He pushed the screen aside and revealed George Kynaston lying stretched unconscious on the divan—the voice rang loud, scornful, from his sleeping lips, and the woman shrank away, appalled.

"Ah ha! Now you zee! Now you know zat I, Jacques Lorraine, zo I am dead, still I fight you! I—I mek zat scar on ze arm of my leetle one, I who mek him Brozer of ze Trees, and because of zat his Own call to him to wake, and he come back to zem! Ah ha, it is I, Jacques Lorraine, who speak to you wit' the mouz of my leetle boy whom you planned to destroy...."

"No! No!" she panted. "It ees a lie! I only . . . I only . . ."

But Pennoyer pounced on her like a plunging hawk.

"It is true! You slew George's father and mother, and you would have slain George too to gain your ends, but that his father made a will that tied your hands! And when you could not do that, you did the next best thing—you tried to cripple him so that he remained helpless, your slave! You planned to cripple his soul for life—or at least until he should have sold the property in Canada and given you the money you hungered for! So that you could make sure of this—or so you thought—you hypnotized him when he was a mere child. You wiped out all memory of his early years, wiped out all his own instincts, his tastes, his ambitions and desires—which is crippling a soul's psychology as surely as though you had cut the muscles of a physical leg or arm—and you imposed on him, your own! When I first saw George Kynaston I *knew* that in some way he was—wrong. He didn't ring true—and now I know the reason! Now you must release your victim . . . or take the consequences."

Crouched together in the deep chair she glowered at Pennoyer. The beads of sweat shone like oil on her dark skin, her black hair had slipped from its neatly regimented waves and hung tousled over her eyes, and with her fur wrap huddled close about her in her fumbling hands, she looked what she was—an Indian squaw, evil, ageing, shaking with fury and frustration. A snake wounded but still dangerous. . . .

"I will not!" she panted. "You cannot make me! Neither you nor your friends, nor anybody een the world! Ah ha, Jacques, I still laugh last! For all this so-clever plot you have made with these men, you know verree well that only the person who laid the curse can lift the curse! Only the hypnotist can release the hypnotized! George shall *never* remember . . . and now I will wake heem so that you cannot speak through heem any more, so that you most go back to the hell you came from to torment me! I will beat you, all of you yet. . . ."

She rose suddenly and made a clumsy plunge towards the divan, but Pennoyer stretched out an arm and she fell back, gasping . . . yet he had not touched her. Her face was dreadful to see, lined and dabbled with sweat, twisted into a grimace of fear, of fury and defiance, and for a split second I wondered whether she was, as she said, going to beat us all—for I knew that what she said was true, and that unless she herself removed the "suggestion" that under hypnosis she had laid upon young George, nobody else could do so. Not even Pennoyer, with all his knowledge—but I did not realize that Jacques Lorraine had reserves that he was even now calling to his aid. His voice came low, threatening:

"So you will not, eh? We shall see. I haf not finish' wit' you . . . yet!"

There was a pause, then sharply her head went up and her nostrils dilated with fear, for the scent of the pines had swept into the room, and suddenly I saw, behind the divan upon which George Kynaston lay, two shapes slowly form themselves against the serried rows of books that lined the walls!

They looked transparent, shadowy, like things built of drifting smoke, yet somehow, though the lines of books, with their coloured backs forming an odd sort of striped pattern, were perfectly visible through the ghostly shapes, the latter were clear enough to see, and growing rapidly clearer as we stared. The shape of a slender pine-tree, and below it, a young Indian girl—George's mother! The shape that had led us to the wood that night, the "ghost" that Molly had seen waiting outside George's bedroom door and mistaken for a Chinese—Taliseh, daughter of the Hurons! She was much clearer to see than she had been in the wood, a small, delicate creature in soft fringed leather tunic and trousers, her black hair hanging in two long plaits one over each shoulder, and her brows bound with a band of coloured bead-work, from which a scarlet feather set at the back stuck jauntily upright. The features of her face were shadowy, but her eyes blazed like two black coals, and they were fixed, glaring, upon the wretched woman who was huddled in the chair beside me—and I knew that Jacques had won!

Those eyes! Merciless, piercing . . . the old trapper spoke in French, and his words were brief.

"Raise the curse, Miretonka, daughter of Chichekeewis, Chief of the Wapokes, known as Gaspard Legros! Raise the curse! Or the spirit of the woman whom you slew, whose husband and son

you stole, shall haunt you till the day of your death and descent into Ponemah!"¹

Whimpering and drooling, on hands and knees the woman crawled towards the divan, while behind and above it towered those two dreadful and beautiful shapes, the Woman and the Tree!

We did not hear the words she muttered over the sleeping boy, but we saw her hands make passes back and forth, and then, with the suddenness of something struck by lightning, she collapsed and lay motionless on the ground—and on the moment, like a flash, the room was normal! The two shadowy shapes and the strong scent of pines had vanished, like wisps of smoke in a tearing gale, and Pennoyer was struggling with the prone figure of the woman.

"Come on, Jerry!" he hissed. "Call Bentley—I told him to stand by—and let's take her up to her room at once. I shall have an interview with her and tie up the threads of all this, but there is no need for George to know all the ugly details of the past! Now he is free he need know nothing—and after all, she was his father's wife. But he may wake any minute now—hurry up!"

Together we managed to carry the woman who had been known as Francine Legros out into the hall, where she recovered sufficiently to walk shakily upstairs supported by Bentley—a mercy, since she was a tremendous weight, and I really do not know how even the three of us would have managed to carry her right up to her room—and as a cowed and beaten foe retreated, we returned to the study. Only just in time, for the boy was stirring, and as we came to the side of the divan, with a natural movement George rolled over, rubbed his eyes, yawned and sat up, and looked from one to the other of us with wide-open eyes.

"I say, sir!" He scrambled apologetically to his feet, addressing Endean. "I'm most awfully sorry. I must have fallen asleep reading. . . ." He stopped. "Why . . . what's happened? I feel—*different*!" He passed his hand dazedly across his forehead and Pennoyer smiled at him.

"It's all over," he said gently. "You're cured! Don't you . . . remember?"

There was a pause while the boy stared straight at my comrade, then he gave a sudden, half-stifled cry.

¹ Indian equivalent of Hell.

"God, yes—oh, my God, it's all come back again! How did I *ever* forget it? Beauvallet, and the house where we used to live—the house on the plateau, the lovely log-house with the pines behind, and the river running below it where I used to fish with Jacques! And Mère Bionnet—I can see her coming out to watch me mount my pony, and banging my knuckles with the spoon when I came to watch her in the kitchen making ginger cookies! How good they were! And the tame raccoon I used to have, and the baby squirrel, and Father and . . ."

He came to a sudden halt and went on slowly, wonderingly, "And . . . and a lovely dark girl with kind eyes that was . . . that was my *mother*!"

He whirled upon Pennoyer, gripping his shoulders, almost beside himself with excitement.

"Tell me, tell me—is it true, or is it some queer dream? Francine . . . *Francine* . . . I used to call her auntie . . . *not* mother! She *isn't* my mother—she never was, and somewhere deep down I always knew it! Oh, my God! . . ."

"Steady, my lad, steady—sit down and I'll explain it all," said Pennoyer as he guided the boy gently into a chair and poured him out a whisky and soda from the tray of drinks that the far-sighted Bentley had left ready on a side-table. "Don't get too excited—though I admit that to have the curtain suddenly go up on a youth you had forgotten ever existed is pretty exciting! Drink this and listen quietly, and I'll tell you what happened, as briefly as I can. . . ."

I could not but admire the adroitness with which my friend handled the story!

There was plainly no sense in telling all the grim facts to the young man—it would merely have created bitterness and done no good, and what was past was past and over. Pennoyer allowed the story of a fall from a tree to stand as an explanation of George's lack of detailed recollections of his early life. He also allowed the death of Paul Kynaston and his first wife to pass as accidents. But he told the truth about old Jacques and the blood pact made with the Trees, pointing out that the snake-shaped scar—incidentally, the totem of Taliseh's clan was a snake, and so was the ornamentation of the wampum belt, which had belonged to her family—had flamed out as a warning as the moment approached in which, unless memory returned to him, George might possibly be persuaded to sell the land.

"Which," interjected George quickly, "I *should* have done, of course, if you hadn't found everything out! Francine had practically persuaded me to sell. She said, and I thought . . . *what* a fool I was! . . . that I'd rather live in England!" He drew a long breath. "My God, what a narrow shave I've had. Go on, sir! And then . . . ?"

Pennoyer then plunged boldly into invention and declared that by administering psychic treatment every night to George while he slept he had been gradually awakening the dominant memories in his brain, and that during his "snooze" on the divan he had been able to put the finishing touches to the cure so that he awakened whole, with his memory completely restored. As a proof that all was well and truly over, he would find—or so, Pennoyer said, he thought—that the scar had vanished. The gap in his memory was filled, and the scar, having fulfilled its usefulness, was gone.

George drew up his sleeve and inspected the arm . . . it was true! His arm was smooth and unmarked as the day he was born. . . .

He shook his head, awestricken.

"It's the most amazing thing I ever heard in all my life," he said. "I—why, I feel quite different! I feel sort of—*complete*. I realize now that I knew, without consciously knowing it, if you see what I mean, that there was always something *missing* in me. I was like a jigsaw puzzle that hasn't got one of the most important pieces in it. . . . I never felt really keen about anything, just fell in with whatever Francine wanted, because I never seemed to *want* anything hard enough to fight for it. Even when I fell in love with Dolly I used to get vaguely worried sometimes, because I thought that as a man with a wife and family in prospect, I *shouldn't* still have that lax, drifting sort of attitude of mind. . . . I never dreamed of connecting it up with my lost memory, I'd got so used to taking that for granted!"

He stroked the firm, brown skin of his forearm reflectively.

"What I can't understand is why Francine never took me back to Canada—and why she was so keen on having me sell the property?"

"I think that's understandable," said Pennoyer quickly. "You must remember that you were quite a little boy when you left, and thanks to this knock on the head you never stressed any desire to go back. And as *she* had always wanted to live in the fashionable world, and *you*, as you grew older, apparently fitted

into it perfectly and liked it too . . . well, there you are! ”

George nodded.

“I suppose that’s it,” he said. “And, of course, you’re perfectly right. I *used* to like town life and cocktail parties, dances and all that rubbish! But now . . .” Rising, he stretched his strong young arms wide and drew a long breath of satisfaction. “Now, my God, I can’t wait to get back to reality! To my own place, to the mountains and trees and rivers, the open country where one can breathe! ” He turned shining eyes on the old man who watched him with a wistful affection. “I can’t wait to show it all to Dolly—Lord, how she’ll adore it, loving outdoor life and animals and scenery the way she does. You’ll let us get married soon, sir—as soon as possible? I feel I’ve wasted so much time. I’m dying to go back there and take everything into my own hands. Everything’s as clear as though I only left a week or two ago! I know Godalbon’s still there, and old Mère Bionnet. I’ve seen letters from them to my—to Francine. And Médard too. . . . Oh, Lord, how can I thank you all? I feel ready to burst. . . .”

There was a little shake in his voice, and indeed it was an emotional moment for us all, to see the heady joy of this rebirth of a soul—the return to life of a sleeping personality, stretching itself, breathing, awakening to life as a frozen limb awakens when the warm blood begins to surge along its veins.

But Pennoyer was not going to allow too much emotionalism. The newly-awakened George needed sleep—a long night, and he would wake in the dawn fully balanced, himself. Vital, eager, complete as he had never been, ready to take life between his hands and make of it what he would. . . .

He patted the boy on the shoulder, and turning him round, pushed him firmly towards the door.

“Now then—bed for you, and a good long night,” he said. “And you can go into all these arrangements to-morrow. Bless you—good night! ”

The young man grinned affectionately at the three of us, and strode down the room and away across the hall, but as he went I heard him beginning to hum a tune. Listening, we smiled at each other. Memory had indeed returned in all its details! For he was singing the song he had learn in his childhood from old Jacques the trapper . . . the song we had heard so weirdly sung by Jacques himself a bare half-hour before.

" *Quand on part du chanquiers. . . .*
Mes chers amis, tous le cœur gai!
Pour aller voir tous nos parents,
Mes chers amis, le cœur content!
Envoyons d'l'avant!
Nos gens
Envoyons d'l'avant!"

There is little else to tell. Pennoyer interviewed Mrs. Kynaston the following morning and informed her curtly that George's memory was fully recovered, and that he was going back to Canada as soon as he was married and arrangements could be made. He also informed her of the version of the past that he had told George, so as to make certain she understood what had—and had *not*—been divulged. He had glossed over the past, and Jacques Lorraine, the only person who knew the truth, was dead—so she could go her way and George his without any rancour or bitter feelings on either side. She would continue to enjoy her own income for life, and on that would have to rest content. She listened in apathetic silence, nodded at intervals and said little beyond a grunted "Yes" now and again. She was a beaten woman—and she knew it.

Young George had slipped so completely out of her grasp that on the morrow—for she departed on the following day, leaving him to stay on at the Hall—they parted almost as strangers. And she did not appear at his wedding, which took place about three months after the scene I have just described to you.

Needless to say, Pennoyer and I were there. It was held at the village church near the Hall, and was one of the prettiest weddings you ever saw—the bride and bridegroom made quite a little stir by taking their honeymoon on horseback before departing for Canada, where they were going to make their home. The honeymoon on horseback was Dolly's idea. If, she said, she was going to be the wife of a pioneer, it was time she started practising! So off they went, taking all they would need stowed in packs attached to their saddles, and as we waved good-bye to them setting off down the drive, a pair of gallant young figures in country riding-kit, the sun bright on George's black head and on her shining brown one, I felt, and I knew that Pennoyer did, how right and splendid it was. Those two, young, strong, handsome people setting out to found a family, to plant, as it were,

a new tree in a new and splendid country—and certainly it all came to pass as we hoped.

“Beaumanoir” is itself again, with old Mère Bionnet, ageing but still active, presiding over the kitchen, with Estéphe Godalbon proudly teaching his old master’s son his father’s ways, with five sturdy children in and out of the house all day, and their young parents busy and happy as only two people can be who are living the life for which both are truly fitted. Only old Jacques Lorraine is missing. But I fancy that though his body lies in the little graveyard in Beauvallet, his strong and loyal spirit still lingers about the house on the plateau, and keeps watch and ward on the boy he did so much to save.

Later I asked Pennoyer what would have happened if Jacques’ Rite of the Trees had been performed *after* Francine’s hypnotizing of the boy instead of before—and my friend told me that in that case there could have been no cure. By “getting in first”, as it were, Jacques had managed to safeguard the boy’s inner self from injury. The subsequent hypnotic order that was laid on him by his stepmother only went skin-deep, so to speak. The Rite of the Trees “blocked” it, prevented it from penetrating to the subconscious mind. If it *had* penetrated so far, it would have removed all George’s personal memories and desires as exactly and completely—and as permanently!—as the guts are removed from a fish! Thanks to the Rite, all Francine’s hypnotism could do was to remove memory from George’s *conscious* mind, while in his subconscious the deeper layers of memory remained untouched, unharmed. So when she was forced into removing the hypnotic spell, the deeper memories, not having been affected, rose up intact, taking possession of the conscious mind—and, as the boy himself said very expressively, he was once more “complete”. Once more a normal being, fit to lead a sane and happy life.

What of Francine Kynaston, who had been Francine Legros, and before that Miretonka, daughter of the one-time Chief of the Wapokes?

Immediately on leaving the Hall she put her London house up for sale and took herself off to the Riviera, where after a while she bought a villa and settled down to the sort of life she preferred; she refused, on the plea of ill-health, to return to England for George’s wedding, merely sending an absurdly ostentatious present to George and his bride, and within a few months at most had faded completely out of their lives. In later

years, occasionally I heard of her from people living there. She was known as "The Squaw", and regarded as an odd and rather eccentric character. She did a good deal of entertaining and was known for her ultra-gorgeous clothes, her reckless gambling, and for certain marked superstitions that people regarded as amusing.

For instance, she could not endure any talk of ghosts, of psychic matters or kindred subjects! And though her villa originally stood in a handsome copse of pine-trees, which formed a large part of its beauty, she had every one of them cut down.

THE CASE OF THE LEANNABH SIDHE

THIS CASE that I am going to tell you about (said my friend Pennoyer) happened in the earlier years of this queer career of mine. I remember I had returned from a difficult but interesting case of exorcism (I believe I told you about it, the case of the Dumb Child), and it had taken a good deal out of me, and I'd promised myself a week-end in the country to rest and replenish my "psychic batteries". But I found there was a letter amongst those awaiting me that rather interested me. It was from a woman—a woman of what the French call "a certain age", I decided, from the slender slanting writing that belonged to the age of our aunts rather than that of our sisters: it was headed "Brown's Hotel, Albemarle Street", and was brief—but very much to the point.

• "DEAR DR. PENNOYER,

"I understand that you make a speciality of dealing with cases that baffle the ordinary medical practitioner. My sister, Mrs. Flaherty, with whom I live, has a young son who is giving us both a considerable amount of anxiety, and we should welcome a talk to you about him, if you could spare the time to call upon us here—or if you prefer, we will call upon you. If you will telephone us we will make our time yours.

"Yours sincerely,

"CATHERINE CARGILL."

I needed a few days' rest rather badly—and though I liked the agreeably direct flavour of the note, I think I *might* have refused the case on the plea of too much work; but it concerned a child, and while the psychic maladies, ills or evils that attack mankind at any age are serious, they are most serious when they attack children, whose minds and souls are so pliant, so terribly vulnerable to the Outer Forces. So I threw up my week-end, telephoned saying I would call, and next day made my way about tea-time to Brown's Hotel. I was shown up to a pleasant suite of rooms on the first floor, and found two ladies, the elder about fifty, the younger, I should say, about forty-two or three, awaiting me in the sitting-room. They greeted me both kindly and

warmly and ordered tea at once—it was plain they were people with plenty of money, for the room was full of flowers, a handsome mink coat lay across the back of one of the chairs, and the large diamond brooch that pinned the collar of the younger lady's, Mrs. Flaherty's, gown was definitely not purchased at Ciro's!

The sisters were very different in type. Mrs. Flaherty had obviously been pretty in a pink-and-white, rather Christmas-card fashion in her youth, but had run to fat in her thirties, and now looked rather like a wax doll that had been left too long before the fire. But she seemed a pleasant, kindly little woman enough, though shy and rather scared and clinging close to her sister, Miss Cargill, who was as tall and lean as she was plump and small; grey-haired and rather grim-looking, but with a surprisingly charming smile to set off her horn-rimmed glasses and somewhat governessy grey tailored gown.

The waiter brought tea, and as he handed round the cakes and scones we talked trivialities—indeed, it seemed that Mrs. Flaherty would have gone on talking trivialities even after he had left the room, as she was evidently dreading the opening of the subject about which I had called. But as I began upon my second muffin, Miss Cargill, despite an imploring glance from her sister, spoke bluntly.

"Dr. Pennoyer, we want your help, please. It's as I wrote you—about my nephew. My sister's boy."

"So I gathered," I said. "And if I can give you any help I shall be only too delighted. So please be frank and tell me what the trouble is."

The sisters glanced at each other.

"That is the difficulty," said Miss Cargill slowly. "We don't know!"

I raised my brows as Mrs. Flaherty laughed uncertainly and looked at her sister.

"You must think us too stupid," she murmured. "And after all, perhaps . . ."

"Nonsense, Aggie!" said Miss Cargill firmly. "Don't try and back out now. You know as well as I do it's neither stupid nor nonsense! There is something definitely wrong with Patrick. . . ."

"If you could give me some idea—some of the symptoms, however trivial?" I suggested.

Miss Cargill frowned and hesitated a moment.

"There's nothing *physically* wrong with him in the least," she said at last. "He's perfectly *healthy*! He can spend hours—days—in the open in all weathers and seasons without a coat and never catches even a cold. It's difficult to describe, but the whole thing is that he's never been quite like other boys and that recently he's getting worse. And . . . we are getting seriously worried." Her level grey eyes met mine. "Again, I don't mean to suggest that he's in the least mental—on the contrary. But there's *something* . . . something definitely not right, and it's come to such a pitch that we are appealing to you to come and try and find out what it is, and if possible put it right."

"How old is he?" I asked.

"Eleven," said Mrs. Flaherty in a small voice. "And well-grown for his age. But old . . ." She checked herself as though about to say something better left unsaid and glanced at her sister as I went on.

"Has he been educated at school—or at home?"

It appeared that he had been to school—to several schools indeed, both as a day-boy and as a boarder; but somehow he had never stayed long at any school. He was clever enough, his reports were first-class . . . indeed he was described as "mentally in many ways far in advance of the average boy of his years" . . . but somehow he did not seem to get on with either boys or masters. I asked for details, but none were forthcoming. There were "stories", apparently—possibly mere boys' chatter, or perhaps jealousy or antagonism of some sort, but there it was; somehow he never stayed long. The last two schools he had been to the Headmasters had written and asked that he might be taken away—oh, no positive accusation was ever made, that was what made it so maddening! Simply that he "had an influence they didn't like" or some lame excuse like that. Now it had become quite difficult to get him accepted at any school . . . it was unfair, of course, and likely to do the boy harm. . . .

Mrs. Flaherty's voice died away and Miss Cargill took up the tale in her refreshingly-direct manner. Tutors also he had had—but there again, none of them stayed very long. None of them had anything definite to say against the lad; but there seemed to be a feeling . . . almost a sort of fear mingled with dislike. . . . Only one had had the courage to put what he felt into words. The last, who had only recently left. . . .

"Oh, Cathie!" pleaded Mrs. Flaherty.

But Miss Cargill went on firmly.

"Nonsense, Aggie! If Mr. Pennoyer takes up the case he *must* hear all we can tell him, whether it sounds nonsense or not!"

"That's what I want," I said at once. "Go on, Miss Cargill. What did this tutor say?"

"He was a Scot," said Miss Cargill slowly, "and he said something to me just as he was standing at the door ready with his bag in his hand to go. He said that he'd tutor any honest-to-God boy . . . but that you wasn't a boy at all, and he wasn't staying to handle anything uncanny! And that he pitied us and wondered how on earth such a being could be born of such a nice normal mother."

Mrs. Flaherty emitted a small sob. She was twisting her plump little hands together over a lace-edged handkerchief.

"My only boy!" she murmured. "And I'm sure he's really all right, if we could only . . ."

"The thing is this," said Miss Cargill, silencing her more emotional sister with a warning glance, "that if you consent to take the case, Mr. Pennoyer, it won't be any use bringing you into contact with him as a—as a sort of doctor? He's too sharp—uncannily so! He would be against you at once and you could do no good. I . . . we wondered . . . whether perhaps you could, if you would, play the part of a resident tutor for a while? We have come up to London ostensibly to engage a new tutor, and in that capacity you would be able to study him at your leisure and draw your own conclusions? But of course it would mean leaving your other work and concentrating entirely on him. And I don't know . . ."

She glanced at her sister and went on after a faint pause, almost hesitatingly, "Of course we realize that this would be asking a great deal of you. But it is urgent, and my sister's only son, and we would pay anything . . ."

"I've not taken up this career for the money I might make out of it, though I appreciate what you say, Miss Cargill," I said. "And if I can get through my immediate work within, say, a week, I feel that I should like to see what I can do—that is, providing I *can* do anything, which of course I can't say until I have studied the child."

I considered a moment. Yes, there was only the Scott haunting case that was all but cleared up, and the obsession case merely needed a hypnotic treatment or two to complete the cure. I would refuse to take on anything fresh till this was dealt with. . . . I nodded.

"I will take the case," I said. "And I think you're very wise to suggest I come as a new tutor. I took my degree in my time, and I've no doubt I can play the part well enough while I watch the boy's reactions."

Both ladies burst out into profuse thanks, which I silenced at once with the repeated warning that I could promise nothing. But I would come and try my best.

Well, within the week I was on my way. My destination was Church Detton—a remote country town in the Cotswolds, where I arrived about six o'clock at night at a pretty little station where rambler roses clustered about the stationmaster's cottage, and the name of the place was blazoned in blue lobelia and yellow calceolaria along the bank opposite. An elderly porter awoke from a profound sleep to transport my baggage outside the station, where, in the dusty road, a handsome brown Daimler, driven by a smart chauffeur in brown dustcoat and cap to match, awaited me. The luggage-carrier on the back of the car took my suitcases easily enough. I tipped the porter and climbed in, and for over an hour we travelled through charming old-world English lanes high-hedged with flowering bushes, dog-roses, honeysuckle, hawthorn and the like, to turn at last between two stone gate-posts into a gravel drive that ended before a dignified brick manor-house set in a large and rambling garden.

A pretty little maid opened the door, and I walked into a low, wide hall with walls panelled in oak, a polished oak floor and two or three handsome pieces of old Jacobean furniture set about with bowls of flowers to lighten and scent what was otherwise a rather gloomy, if handsome interior. It was roughly square in shape, and several doors opened off it, both right and left, while a flight of oaken stairs with lovely corkscrew balusters and low, comfortable treads wound upwards into the upper portion of the house. . . . Even as I entered, one of the doors opened and Mrs. Flaherty and her sister emerged.

Both ladies greeted me with such relief and gratitude that I felt quite touched, and followed Miss Cargill up the stairs to find my room, whither the chauffeur and maid had already transported my modest baggage, with a feeling that I was definitely and pleasantly welcome.

I noticed as the elder lady climbed the stairs that she had a slight but unmistakable limp, and wondered why, deciding to ask for myself when I had grown to know her a little better. She left me in a charming low-ceiled room boasting a carved oak

fourposter bed, hung with ancient red and white printed linen, that made my mouth water, and Hammond the chauffeur, who had slipped off his brown dustcoat, revealing a neat dark suit, proceeded to unpack my things with neatness and despatch.

I chatted to him as he worked, and found that he played rôles other than that of chauffeur at the Manor House! There was actually little driving to be done, and he performed various house duties such as valeting occasional visitors, waiting at table, even occasional gardening if the gardener needed help. He was a nice, open-faced fellow of about forty-five or six and talked to me cheerfully as he arranged my clothes. He had been a long time with Mrs. Flaherty—who (he declared) was “one of the nicest ladies God ever put breath into”. He had known her husband too, before he was killed in a motor-car in Ireland. Miss Cargill, too—that was a nice lady, for all she looked so severe, and it had been a godsend for poor Madam when she came to live with her after the Master’s death in Ireland. . . .

“It sounds a nice family you’re working for,” I said. “Is young Master Patrick as nice as his mother and aunt?”

I had put the question deliberately, watching his face. As I had half expected, he paused suddenly in his work of laying my shirts and collars, handkerchiefs and underwear into their respective drawers, and his answer, when it came, was obviously guarded.

“I don’t see much of Master Patrick, sir. He’s generally out rabbiting or wandering about, like . . . unless he’s at his lessons.”

“But if you’ve been with the Flahertys so long, you must have seen a good deal of him, surely?” I persisted.

Hammond hesitated, laid the last of my shirts neatly on the top of the others, and, shutting the drawer, replied without looking at me.

“I used to, sir, when he was a little ’un. But he’s changed a good bit since then, and since we came to live in England—here, I mean—he’s mostly out and about on his own concerns and don’t stay around the house very much. And if that’s all I can do for you, sir, I’ll go and help Molly lay the dinner.”

He was obviously anxious to get away, so I said no more, but dressed leisurely and found my way down to the drawing-room, where I found both sisters awaiting me before a wood-fire—welcome, despite the fact that the month was June, since the evening was distinctly chilly—beside which was a small table

set with glasses and a lovely Waterford decanter of brown sherry.

I refused the drink and asked for fruit-juice instead, and sat talking to the sisters, feeling that as far as creature comforts went my lines had certainly fallen into pleasant places.

The drawing-room was a fine large room with white woodwork, and walls painted a delicate sparrow-egg blue. It had long windows opening upon a wooden verandah with posts set at intervals along the edge that supported a wide green-and-white striped linen awning that jutted out from the house-front above the window-frame, which verandah was furnished with a green-painted table and various wicker chairs that proved that it was in constant use in warm weather as an annexe to the drawing-room. Three shallow steps ran down from the verandah to a long, sloping lawn with a handsome herbaceous border on each side, and at the bottom of the lawn was a sort of small plantation of flowering shrubs, almond, cherry, prunus, forsythia and so on. Beyond that was a fence that marked the end of the garden proper, and on the other side of the fence was a belt or patch of woodland in which, I subsequently found, a miniature lake lay hidden that fed the stream that, marked by a row of pollard willows, meandered away through the distant green fields towards where a line of telegraph-poles along the skyline showed the road down which I had just driven. There was a grand piano in one corner of the drawing-room, its top heaped with music; deep-blue curtains picked up the colour of the blue delphiniums that patterned the cretonne sofa- and chair-covers; the furniture was an attractive mixture of old and new; there was a long range of well-filled bookshelves, on the walls were one or two good pictures, and a lovely Venetian mirror gleamed over the high white Adams mantelpiece.

I looked about for my pupil, but finding no sign of him, put the obvious question. There was a quick interchange of glances between the sisters, and Miss Cargill answered with, I thought, a hint of rather overdone casualness, that she was "afraid Patrick was running rather wild these days. We never wait dinner for him—he comes in to meals more or less as he likes. He is probably fishing with one of the local farmers' boys, or collecting birds' eggs, or something of that sort."

As she spoke, Hammond came into the room, and I saw a queer look flash across his face as he caught her sentence—a look almost sardonic. But it was gone even as I noted it. He an-

nounced dinner, and I followed the ladies into an attractive little dining-room, where a handsome oval walnut table was laid for four, with lace mats and red candles in silver candlesticks, and Molly, the pretty maid, stood beside the sideboard to assist Hammond in serving the dinner.

The dinner was as good as the surroundings, and the conversation pleasant, though I confess to devoting most of my attention to Miss Cargill, who was vastly more interesting as a companion than her sister. Her reading was wide, she had travelled considerably and learnt much in her travels—had also had a certain amount of experience in psychic work and study, so much that she was not prepared to pooh-pooh any belief, no matter how apparently fantastic—for which I was grateful. I felt that I might need her help in dealing with my “pupil”, and the fact that as regards these matters she was not encased in the armour of mingled fear and distaste that bound her less intelligent sister, was a source of considerable satisfaction to me.

We had returned to the drawing-room and were sitting over our coffee talking easily and pleasantly when I brought up the subject of Patrick again. By this time I was getting definitely curious to see the boy. . . .

“It’s getting late, and I haven’t made the acquaintance of my pupil yet, Mrs. Flaherty,” I said. “What time does he generally come in at night?”

“I’m afraid,” said Mrs. Flaherty uncomfortably, “I—he’s not very regular in his habits. I don’t . . .” She glanced uneasily at her sister and that lady spoke easily, airily.

“Oh, he’ll be about somewhere! He comes and goes as he likes. You see, my sister doesn’t believe in too much ‘cabining and confining’ for a growing boy. . . .”

As she spoke I heard Hammond, who had come in to remove the coffee-tray, draw in his breath quickly. He was standing close to me and I don’t think the ladies heard it, but I glanced up sharply and saw that he was staring at the French windows, closed now but still uncurtained to the night, and following his glance I saw that against the glass of the window a face was pressed. A child’s face crowned with a tossing mane of light hair, with wide eyes fixed intently upon us as we sat cosily around the fire, talking and laughing, already on a footing of old and trusted friends. . . . I got the swift impression of an outcast looking in—and it was not for a long time that I realized how right, in a sense, I was!

He stood wedged up against the thick-growing ivy at one side of the window, so that his body was concealed and only that face, white, intent, unblinking, hung close against the window-pane, backed by the dark of the night, like a mask suspended in air, staring.

And there was something about that grim, unwinking stare that made me draw in my breath as Hammond had done. . . . I opened my mouth to speak, but Miss Cargill anticipated me. She had followed my glance to the window. . . .

"Patrick!" she said, and her voice was loud and firm. "Patrick, come in and shake hands with Mr. Pennoyer!"

As Hammond, putting down the coffee-tray, went down the room to open the window to the peering creature outside, I sensed not only in Mrs. Flaherty, but in Miss Cargill also, a strange sense of sudden tension; it was as though they braced themselves to meet something. . . .

Yet when a sturdy young figure in flannel shorts and shirt slipped into the room I felt a momentary rush of relief and could have kicked myself for imagining things. For here, surely, stood the most normal and ordinary eleven-year-old, snub-nosed, light-haired, blue-eyed, with grass-stains on shirt and shorts and scratches on his sunburnt knees, and the toes of his brown shoes scuffed and dirty with scrambling. . . . He nodded at me rather casually and held out a grubby paw.

"You're my new tutor, aren't you?" he said and, glancing up at Mrs. Flaherty, smiled brilliantly.

I saw her look at him with an expression of pitiful, adoring love that was shot through at the same time with a most strange hint of fear—but she slipped her arm around him and he leant affectionately back against her as he continued his inquisition.

"You're Mr. Pennoyer, I know. They call me Patrick Flaherty." (The odd phrasing of this sentence, "they call me", stuck curiously in my mind, to be explained later.) "I hope you don't expect me to know too much. Or do you?"

"That depends," I said cautiously, "on what sort of response you've made to the efforts of my predecessors!"

He laughed suddenly and glanced at Miss Cargill, who sat quite still and upright on the further side of the fire, watching him.

"That's easy," he said. "I haven't made any response—or at least not much. I'm what they call a problem child—aren't I, mother?" He twisted his head round to smile afresh at Mrs. Flaherty, and I saw her eyes fill as she held him close to her side.

"Don't they, mother?" he insisted, watching her with intent bright eyes, and she muttered something and turned her head away. He turned to me again with the same glittering smile.

"You see, I never stay at schools—and I don't keep tutors very long. They don't like me—or there's something *about* me they don't like . . ." The glittering smile positively blazed . . . "and they don't stay. I wonder if you will?"

"I—I'm sure I hope so," I said rather feebly.

But to tell the truth, for the moment I was completely disconcerted. I had been prepared for wariness, sulks, shyness, open dislike or distrust, for a dozen things—but not for this *dégagé* mockery, this unchildlike *blague*. I remembered Mrs. Flaherty's murmur when I asked her son's age. "Eleven . . . but old . . ." I realized its truth. Old? There *was* something incredibly old—and uncanny—behind that wide and gleaming smile.

The boy's eyes never moved from my face as he went on smoothly, evenly, leaning back against his mother. I saw her arm tremble, but she kept it valiantly round him as he went on.

"I don't think you will! The betting's all against it in the servants' hall." Those blue, unblinking eyes were fixed on Hammond now. "In fact, Hammond's got his next week's wages on your leaving before the month's out. Aren't I right, Hammond?"

Hammond's brown face flushed darkly, but before he could speak Miss Cargill broke in.

"You are talking rather too much for a small boy, aren't you, Pat?" she said firmly. "And what Hammond or any of the staff like to do or say is no concern of yours! Take the coffee away, Hammond."

I saw two pairs of eyes meet, the lady's steady, dominant, the child's . . . well, it's difficult to say quite what I read into those blue, childish eyes raised to Miss Cargill's. I would have said defiance—but when I say that I don't mean the ordinary wilful defiance of a naughty child. I mean the surly, furtive defiance of something quite unchildlike, and with that defiance a look of venomous dislike—nay, a look of hate so profound and bitter that it gave me a feeling as though someone had laid a chilly hand down the centre of my spine. It was as though someone had slipped the boyish mask aside and shown me something on the further side that was not only unboyish, but not quite human. . . .

However, the child made no reply beyond that one glance, but turned away and, apparently losing interest in me, squatted down upon a velvet *pouffe* on the further side of the fire, and taking a flat drawing-book from under his arm, proceeded to devote himself to sketching or scribbling while I resumed my talk with the ladies. But I was anxious to try to establish some sort of contact with the boy for whose sake I had set aside all my other work, and after a while I spoke to him across the firelight.

"I see you're interested in drawing, Patrick—may I see some of your things?"

He raised his head and looked at me across the rosy gleam of the fire. There was a little pause before he answered.

"I only scribble," he said evasively. "Nothing worth while. It wouldn't interest you."

He shut the book, slipped an elastic band round it and sat with his arms folded over it almost as though to protect it.

"Patrick can draw and paint and carve all sorts of pretty things out of wood, and whistle so that any bird will come to him," said Mrs. Flaherty with a rather pathetic sort of pride. "He's very artistic. . . ."

The child laughed abruptly as he rose and, tucking the book under his arm, strolled over to the piano.

"I may not have been as great a success in school as some boys," he said, "but I can do lots of things that other boys can't. Can't I, mother? Eh?"

There was an odd hint of challenge in his voice, and Mrs. Flaherty's voice was faint as she replied, after a pause.

"Yes. Yes! Oh my God, yes. . . ."

The last words were a mere whisper, and I knew not intended for me to catch. But my hearing is peculiarly sharp and I glanced quickly at the woman . . . and then back to the piano, where the boy was just opening the great instrument. I was surprised and distinctly impressed.

"It appears my pupil is gifted," I laughed to Miss Cargill. "Does Patrick really play as well as draw? And are his drawings really mere scribble?"

Miss Cargill nodded slowly.

"He plays—well," she said briefly. "As regards his drawings—you would have to judge for yourself—if he shows them to you. He doesn't—often."

The answer was cryptic—but the first half of it was certainly true. The boy's small hands took control of the instrument with

the sureness of a master, and astonished and impressed, I settled myself down for a treat, as from Liszt to Beethoven, from Chopin to Mozart he wandered, and the two women sat listening, their shadowed eyes on the fire, their hands idle on their laps . . . at least the hands of Miss Cargill were idle. But I saw that Mrs. Flaherty's hands were restless. They twitched and trembled, clasped together, twisted over each other, played with and plucked at the stuff of her dress . . . a terribly nervy woman, poor soul, I decided, and wondered how much of her nervousness was justified by facts, or whether, like many women, she had allowed herself to exaggerate a situation that was capable of a normal explanation into a semi-hysterical obsession? Was there real and serious reason for her to worry over Patrick?

Of course I had barely made his acquaintance yet, but though he seemed precocious, certainly, and inclined to pertness and over-assurance, I had as yet seen no signs of anything more positively disquieting—barring my own inner instincts, which had certainly sent out the signal "danger". I had not liked that steely, unmirthful smile, nor the look in his eyes when he had "measured" Miss Cargill, as she snubbed him about Hammond—but after all, that might be childish rebellion or dislike, and up to date I had seen nothing really tangible to justify the suggestion of "queerness". Yet even as the thought passed through my mind, as though in answer to it, I became aware that the boy was playing something new—and playing it with a subtle difference. He was playing that supremely eerie masterpiece—Sibelius' "Valse Triste".

I had heard it before, but never in my life had I heard it played with such uncanny and unpleasant power! The room was shadowed, lighted only by the gleam of the fire, a handsome Sèvres reading-lamp and candles, which Mrs. Flaherty considered far more beautiful than modern electric lighting, and I heartily agreed with her. And somehow that child was filling that shadowed room with *other* shadows—shadows that seemed to glide and swirl about us, closer and closer, dimming the lights and bringing with them the very essence of the haunted music.

One could see the dying woman cowering, too terrified to shriek, while one by one the grim ghosts stole in at her bedroom door and danced their silent saraband about her bed. One could positively hear the grisly rustle of their garments, the murmur of their gloating laughter as they circled about their cringing victim, whose eyes, bulging with mortal terror, showed the light of reason

departing as she awaited the entrance of Death, the last and most terrific figure of the horrible troupe. . . .

I found myself shivering unaccountably, and a nasty damp sweat gathered in the palms of my hands and beaded my forehead, and I tried to move and found I could not. Alarmed, I forced myself to turn my head and look at the child as he played—and I saw that over the corner of the great instrument he was watching us, and smiling as he watched! Smiling that queer inhuman smile. A cold shiver ran down my back for the second time that evening, and yet his eyes were not upon me, but upon his mother—and I saw she was looking back at him, with the gaze horrified, fascinated, of a rabbit before a snake. Her pleasant round face had gone quite white, and her twisting hands were still as her eyes, fixed, terrified. . . .

Miss Cargill rose sharply to her feet, and walking over to the piano, swept the boy's hands from the keys and shut down the piano-lid with a crash. I heard her voice, firm, dominant, rising over the blurr of notes that still re-echoed within the piano.

"You've played quite enough for to-night, Pat," she said evenly. "And it's time for you to go to bed. Run along."

For a moment the boy crouched there on the stool, staring up at the tall woman who stood over him, and I could sense as sharply as though I heard the actual clashing of steel in mortal combat, the clash and challenge of their two wills as they met and held—but the woman's was the stronger. His face was dark with fury, but without a word he slipped off the piano-stool and, tucking his sketch-book under his arm, departed without a word to any of us—and I admit that as the door closed behind him I heaved a sigh of relief!

The two ladies were obviously shaken, so I hastily suggested the wireless, and under the cheerful normal clamour of dance-music from London the tensity of the atmosphere slowly cleared; and when at last I rose to make my good-night bow, Miss Cargill, rather to my surprise, volunteered to show me to my room. I guessed that this was merely an excuse to speak to me alone, and I was right, for directly we left the drawing-room and the door was safely closed behind us, she looked at me and spoke at once.

"My sister—as perhaps you can see—is in such a state of nerves about Patrick that she isn't quite balanced. He can reduce her to absolute jitters if he likes—and he *does* like, as you can see. She's like a rabbit before a snake. . . ."

"How does he do it?" I said, "and does he do it often?"

"He can do it not only by playing the piano, but in a dozen different ways," said Miss Cargill grimly, "and with dozens of different people, barring myself and Hammond the chauffeur! He can't affect either of us in the least—though he's tried. The villagers are mortally scared of him, and nobody will speak to him if they can avoid it . . . that's why Hammond looked so odd when I said he was out fishing with the farmers' boys! I said that, of course, because of my sister. . . . I try to keep up some sort of fiction about his being quite a normal boy before her, it seems to help her to bear it."

"Why does he try to influence people?" I asked. "To satisfy a sense of power?"

"Partly that, perhaps," said the lady, "but really he seems to have some queer sort of spite against humanity. And though in an odd way he's fond of his mother, I'm sure in certain moods he is more cruel to her than to anybody, as though he were revenging himself on her for that very fondness."

"I'll admit," I said, "that at first, to be honest, I wondered whether you ladies weren't perhaps, in your love and anxiety over the boy, making a mountain out of a really quite ordinary molehill. But you are right. There is something queer about that boy, and I'll do my best to find out what it is and where it springs from—without that we cannot hope to find a cure."

"You've given me a little hope already," said the lady gratefully, "by not laughing the whole thing off at once! You don't know how many doctors, child-experts, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and all sorts of healers of various sorts and kinds we've had down here on one pretext or another. Now please let me help in every way I can. Is there anything I or my sister can tell you, about Patrick's early life, about his surroundings and upbringing or anything else, that may be useful?"

I hesitated.

"Not for the moment, I think, frankly," I said at last. "It's better not to know *too* much at the start. I want to get my impressions completely fresh—uncoloured by anything I'm told by *anybody*. Later on, when I've made some progress and want to collate and sum up those impressions, I shall ask you or your sister—both of you probably—to give me as many details of the boy's early life and history as you can. But at the moment I want to keep the slate absolutely untouched and let what comes write itself as it likes."

"I think you're very wise—and we shall be guided entirely by

you," said Miss Cargill, "so now I'll wish you a really good night!"

I *did* sleep well—but only, I am convinced, because I did what I always do when I am conscious of being near some creature or influence that I do not understand and have reason to distrust. I built round myself before I slept a "ring" or fence of psychic power that would act as a guard against any inimical force that tried to come near me—and it was needed! On waking I remembered dimly that all through the early part of the night I had been aware of something prowling, circling, and poking, trying to come near me . . . for what reason I had no idea. Possibly mere curiosity, possibly something quite different . . . but it could not pierce the barrier of power behind which I lay, so I awoke refreshed to a lovely day. Had a pleasant breakfast with the two sisters and Patrick—looking, in clean shirt and shorts and well-brushed hair, the very pattern of exemplary small boys—and afterwards adjourned to the schoolroom upstairs to put my pupil through his paces.

In the sunny morning light, as he sat facing me while I questioned him, he seemed so very ordinary a boy that I wondered afresh whether I was not perhaps being influenced by two rather nervy, over-anxious women into reading more into the situation than was actually there. After all, what precisely *had* happened last night? A clever child had played a sinister piece of music remarkably well, and various hints, none very coherent, had been dropped by two women who were obviously so tensely concentrated upon him that their outlook might well be a little out of balance—nothing more substantial!

I resolved to maintain my own judgement as unbiassed as possible. I started the morning's lessons—and soon found myself agreeably surprised by the quick and mobile quality of my pupil's mind.

His education up to date seemed to have been oddly patchy. For instance, he had little knowledge of arithmetic, and less of grammar and general literature, and his knowledge of history and geography was extraordinarily uneven. He knew, for instance, accurately and in detail, the lives of Nero, of Julian the Apostate, of the Borgias, Cagliostro and Nostradamus and Catherine de Medici—in these and other of the less pleasant characters in history he took an almost morbid interest. But as regards the lives of William the Conqueror, of Richard Cœur de Lion, Elizabeth or Edward the Confessor, his knowledge was nil, and when

questioned he merely looked blank, and said they "bored him, so he couldn't remember anything about them". Therefore, on certain periods of history he was a positive authority, whereas others simply didn't seem to "register"—and it was just the same with geography. (It was not till considerably later that I began to understand the underlying reason for all this, and to piece it together with other matters to make a coherent pattern.)

Certain countries held his attention, while other countries interested him not at all. For instance, he was passionately interested in Haiti, and knew a startling amount about the history of the Voodoo and Obeah-worship said still to prevail there; and he knew every detail—far more than I knew myself—about the grim and bloodstained figure of the "Black Emperor" of Haiti. The Spain of Inquisition days also interested him, and he would pore for hours over books that dealt with the old slave-days in America, in Africa, Jamaica and Brazil, when torture, superstition and kindred horrors were rife. The period of European and English history that deals with witches and witch-finding in the Middle Ages fascinated him, and he possessed an uncanny knowledge of folk-lore, legends, beliefs of all sorts, belonging to almost every country. But the one country—and that surprised me, knowing its wealth of folk-lore and fairy legend, quite apart from his own Irish blood—that he resolutely refused to discuss or learn anything about, was Ireland.

He was a born actor and mimic, and could, as his mother had said, imitate the call or cry of any bird or animal with uncanny accuracy. He adored music and poetry and would recite by the hour, in a queer chanting sort of rhythm, the pieces he loved—mostly blank verse, to which his odd method of reciting gave a curious, almost hypnotic effect. I already knew he could draw, though in what sort of a fashion I had no idea, as he still refused to show me his sketch-book—a refusal I put down to a child's innate shyness, and refrained from pressing the point. His knowledge of flowers and plants, animal life, birds and fishes was profound in so young a boy—and I was told that he possessed an amazing power over animals of every kind, except dogs, who refused to go near him. This explained the absence of any dog at the Manor House—which had rather surprised me at first, as I should have imagined so typical a country house and such typical country women as Mrs. Flaherty and her sister possessing at least two or three dogs. It also emphasized my inner feeling that despite any arguments, *something* was wrong with Patrick—

and that something definitely "bad". Dogs, those animals nearest of all to the human in development, are remarkably sure barometers of evil. . . .

Altogether I found my pupil a curious and interesting problem, and was so busy studying him and trying to plan his lessons so as to fill in the gaps in his education, that the best part of a week passed by quite uneventfully—nothing at all on the lines of my first rather eerie evening occurred, to my knowledge at least. Perhaps nothing actually *did* occur, and he was "lying low"—it is quite possible, as he might well have been equally busy studying me and trying to make me out, as I was with him. Anyway the next few days passed peacefully enough, and but for one or two nights, when I was again conscious of that prowling entity trying to get past my protective circle, there was nothing of interest to report.

But one morning about a week later something rather startling happened. I had been out for a walk the previous afternoon and run across Molly, the pretty little housemaid who shared the waiting at table with Hammond. She was standing talking agitatedly with a good-looking gipsyish fellow in green corduroys with silver buttons on his coat—I put him down as somebody's gamekeeper—and avoided my glance as I passed, so I pretended not to notice her and walked on. But the meeting had a startling sequel on the following morning when, on descending the stairs to breakfast in the dining-room, I found Hammond stationed at the sideboard, not Molly, as was usual.

The two ladies had just entered the room before me, and an agitated conversation was in progress between them and Hammond, during which I gathered that "George" ("George" being Rider the gardener, to whom apparently Molly had been engaged) had had a fight over the girl with "Gipsy Bert"—whom I had no difficulty in identifying as Molly's escort of the previous afternoon. "George" had got the worst of it and was lying half-dead in his cottage, and "Bert" had fled. It appeared that the news had been telephoned to the Manor House from Rider's cottage by George's mother, who had found him lying bleeding from a serious knife-wound on the threshold of his cottage, and Molly, who had answered the telephone, had gone into hysterics and was now lying in a state of collapse in the kitchen. . . .

With exclamations of distress Mrs. Flaherty and her sister hurried out of the room in the direction of the servants' quarters, and Hammond turned to me.

"You waiting breakfast for Master Patrick, sir?" he said—and it struck me that there was something faintly pointed in the way he spoke.

"Why of course, he isn't down yet," I said, and felt surprised, as it was the only meal at which Patrick made, as a rule, a fairly regular appearance.

I glanced round the room and out upon the terrace, but there was no sign of him and I went on apparently casually—though actually I was on the alert. Up to date, I suppose, out of loyalty, as he thought it, towards his employer, Hammond had carefully stone-walled any attempts on my part to pump him—but he was evidently at breaking-point now.

"I suppose he's overslept and you ought to go up and shake him," I said.

Hammond snorted.

"Overslept? No fear! He's up and about—he's been up these two hours like he always is! Don't seem to need sleep like regular boys . . . but *I* know where he is. George's mother just told me on the 'phone. He's down there . . . by the cottage. Hiding in the thicket near by, and gloating. . . ."

A thrill of horror ran through me. The picture was truly hateful, sketched in those few crude words. Gloating upon the broken figure asprawl across that neatly white-stoned doorstep, with the ugly stain of blood spoiling its purity. . . .

"What do you mean?" I asked quietly. "Go on, Hammond—you've said too much now not to say more. You must know that, surely."

"Well . . . I guess you had to know, sir." He looked at me deprecatingly.

"It may help you," I said, "to know that the ladies have already confided in me their trouble about Master Patrick, and I am trying to find some way of helping them. I'm not merely here to give him lessons! So if you're worrying about telling their secrets, your mind may be relieved, my good fellow. Anything you can tell me may be more useful than you can guess."

The look of surprise and relief that spread over his honest, rugged face was good to see. He opened his mouth to speak, but at the same moment shut it and stood listening. A faint whistle came across the lawn from the belt of trees at the far end, beyond which lay the tragic cottage, and thrusting a dish of hot porridge he had but a moment before taken from the electric

heater that stood upon the sideboard, back into its place, Hammond turned towards the door.

"Come up, sir—come to my room, if you don't mind, and watch him come up the lawn . . . now, quick. Come on!"

We ran out of the room, down a passage, and up a narrow flight of stairs like lamplighters, and into a neat little bedroom over the kitchen—one of a group of similar rooms occupied by the staff of the Manor House. Hammond closed the door behind us and led me to the window, which was neatly curtained in white muslin and overlooked the lawn.

Hammond peered through the curtains and nodded, his lips compressed into a bitter line. From the kitchen below the sound of weeping came, and the murmur of voices as the women tried to comfort the weeper. . . .

"There he comes—now, see, watch him! Often and often I've watched him come up the lawn to the house with that look on his face—and always I've known there was some devilry doing when he looked like that!"

The boy was strolling leisurely up the lawn, hands in pocket, whistling idly, a shrill lilting little tune, a nasty little tune that sent a pringling sensation along one's nerves. He paused now and then to sniff at a flower or kick a tuft of grass, and to all appearances he was nothing but an ordinary youngster idling his way along, in no particular hurry, and with nothing particularly remarkable about him. But as he came nearer, and the sound of Molly's weeping stole out upon the air and met his ear, he paused and stood still a minute, looking up at the house and smiling . . . and a cold shiver went down my spine! For the look on that listening, smiling face, for all its round and sunburnt youth, was the look of a cool devil hearing, and relishing as he heard them, the cries of one of his helpless victims as he tortured them. . . .

I shrank away from the window with a sudden exclamation of horror, and Hammond, looking at me, nodded with satisfaction.

"You see?" he said. "Gloating—just gloating! He's done it again . . . just as he's done it God knows how many times before, that I know of and the village knows of. And as many times again that we can guess but can't prove. . . ."

"How do you mean 'he's done it'?" I asked. "A mere child surely couldn't have had a hand in anything so tragic as this?"

"*Couldn't* he?" said Hammond grimly. "I tell you, there hasn't been a wicked thing happen in the village since he come

to live here that he hasn't had a hand in—though I know it can't always be proved, worse luck! He pulled the strings to make Bert and Molly meet—just because she was tokened to George, and they was as happy as the day was long, and he couldn't bear it! Had to do something to spoil it—that's his way. I guessed from the way he grinned when he heard she and George was fixing the wedding-day that he'd be up to something, and I told him if he didn't keep his meddling, wicked little fingers out of this I'd break his neck. But it didn't do no good." His honest face was troubled. "He was too sharp! First thing I knew he was teasing Molly about throwing herself away on a lout like George when she ought to have had some fun first, and talking about gipsies and what gay, romantic chaps they were, and how Bert was handsome wasn't he, and how he thought her the prettiest girl in the village. . . . I told him off good and sharp, and Molly too, for listening, but it wasn't no kind of use. He just grinned at me, and Molly tossed her head. And later on I found that whenever she was out for her half-day, Bert 'ud be dangling outside in the lane—though God knows how that young devil got word to him she'd be there—and Bert never was a slow worker as far as women were concerned!" He drew a long breath. "Well, there you are. The girl's in the family way, and Bert can't marry her even if he wanted, which I doubt . . . he's got a hedgerow sort of a wife of his own somewhere and a row of kids. . . ."

"It's a tragic story," I said hesitatingly, "but not necessarily due to the string-pulling of a boy, Hammond. These things happen."

"Then why do they happen so often when he's somewhere in the background?" said Hammond. "I'm not asking you to believe me, 'cause of this one isolated case, sir—this is only one of dozens where he's had a finger in the pie, somehow, somewhere, though you can't always pin down exactly where."

"How did this tragedy finally blaze up—do you know?" I asked.

Hammond nodded.

"Molly came crying and howling into the kitchen last night—that must 'a' been after you'd seen her talking to Bert in the lane, sir. She told him she was in for a baby—and *he* told her there was nothing doing in the way o' marriage and went off whistling, and she came back here and collapsed before the whole lot of us—we were too sorry for the girl to say 'I told you so', though

we *had* and all, a dozen times over. And later she wrote out a letter to George telling him what had happened and sent it down by the gardener's boy to leave at George's cottage, and of course George lays for Bert early this morning and gets the worst of it—as anybody might have told him, dealing with that slippery devil with his knife."

"They're positive it was Bert who did it then?" I said.

"George had one of his silver buttons with a bit of green stuff still stuck to it clutched in one hand," Hammond said. "And there's nobody else wears that sort of rig in the village—nor uses a knife. So there we are! George either dead or dying, Bert on the run from the police, and Molly carrying a bastard, poor girl—and my lord comes up the garden grinning like a Cheshire cat! D'you wonder I get the creeps when he comes near me? If it wasn't for being sorry for Madam and her sister I wouldn't stay. But I can't leave 'em to *that*—alone. . . ."

"I don't blame you for feeling that way," I said sincerely.

"And I'm not the only one," continued Hammond. "There's nobody calls on the ladies now, though there was plenty in the beginning—but they all dropped off, scared of him or something about him, and now everybody fights shy of the Manor House. It don't seem reasonable to think that the whole village has got the wrong idea, now do it, sir?"

"What idea exactly *have* they got?" I said downrightly.

Hammond hesitated.

"I can't rightly put it into words," he said. "But Master Patrick's got *something* about him that's not like ordinary boys. Even as a very little chap, when he came here first, he was queer and horrid—cruel, sort of, and yet not the ordinary sort of little-boy cruel that sticks caterpillars into spiders' webs or pulls the wings off flies. He don't hurt animals—it's humans he seems to have a down on."

I remembered Miss Cargill's words, "seems to have a spite against humanity"—but Hammond was going on.

"He's always had it in for his auntie, now—and it's my belief he's responsible for her being lame like what she is!"

I uttered an incredulous exclamation and Hammond nodded firmly.

"Well, you listen to me a minute, sir! It happened when Miss Aggie had to go over to Ireland and see about some business connected with the estate; about four years ago it was. Miss Aggie didn't want to go without her sister, but that meant taking

Master Patrick, and the hubbub that child raised at the thought of going back to Ireland, the place where he was born . . . well, it u'd have to ha' been seen to be believed! Miss Cargill was all for over-riding his whims, as she called it, and the three of them going, lock, stock and barrel, whatever he said. But Master Pat had worked himself into such a state that he frightened his mother, and she said she wouldn't force him, and then they tried to arrange things so that Miss Cargill—she was always the one with the business head—could go to Ireland and see to the business there, instead of Miss Aggie. But it couldn't be done, because Miss Aggie being the owner of Killeen, it was only her could sign and decide things. So over she had to go, and Miss Cargill had to stay behind to look after Master Patrick."

"Couldn't they have left him in charge of a well-trained nurse?" I asked. "Or a nursery governess?"

Hammond glanced at me half-scornfully.

"Nurse?" he said. "He used to scare his nurses so they wouldn't stay more than a few months, and it was the same with governesses. He had a string of 'em going and coming till he grew old enough to go to school . . . don't ask me what he done to them, because I don't know. And maybe at that it isn't just anything actual he *done* so much as the sort of thing he is . . . whatever it may be."

I glanced appreciatively at the speaker. It is often given to the simple and unlettered to put the whole gravamen of a matter into a single graphic phrase. "The sort of thing he is" . . . how completely that described Patrick! He was a "thing" rather than a human child. . . .

"Well," said Hammond, "Master Patrick was simply livid when he found he was going to be left with his auntie! As far as he's got any sort of affection for anybody he seems to have it for his mother, poor lady—or maybe it's just because he can do what he likes with her, and with Miss Cargill he has to toe the line, for all his cunning. But for all his scenes and pleadings, Miss Aggie went off to Ireland with her maid and I stayed here with Miss Cargill and him."

"Well now, Master Patrick had a pet cat in those days—a nasty slinking little ginger beast we all hated, and the villagers specially. They used to hint it was a what-d'you-call-it . . . you know, sir, the sort of creature them old witches was supposed to have with 'em."

"Familiars!" I nodded. "Sort of special little animal given

them by the Devil to help them in their work for him. Yes, go on. . . ."

"Well, however that may be, it was a sly, vicious beast, but Master Patrick he always had it with him, walking by him or on his shoulder or cuddling up to him like. He used to stroke it and whisper to it and laugh with it . . . odd it was to watch! And I remember as well as if it was yesterday that one night about a week after Miss Aggie went away to Ireland Miss Cargill was going out to dinner. Quite a party it was to be—*then*, the ladies was still asked out now and again, though their list of invitations was beginning to thin out—so she was all dressed up in her best, and I'd brought the car round and was standing by it, waiting for her outside the front door. The door was open, because it was very hot weather, and I could see right into the hall, and I saw Master Patrick crouched in a corner of the hall, just below the stairs. He had this cat in his arms, and he was whispering to it and stroking it—and there was a sort of gleam in his eyes I'd learned not to like! I was in two minds to step in and tell him to run along out and play, and I wish I'd done it now . . . but I was too late. Just as I moved forward, he let the cat go and she ran upstairs and jumped on the square newel-post at the top of the stairs just as Miss Cargill came rustling along the landing from her room.

"She was a handsome lady in those days, and she looked fine in her evening dress—black velvet it was, with a trailing skirt and long gloves and a cloak trimmed with white fur and lots of diamonds—and as she came to the top of the stairs she saw the cat sitting on the post and said, 'Hullo, pussy' or something of the sort and put out her hand to stroke it. She didn't like the beast any more than the rest of us, but she was always one to be kind to animals, was Miss Cathie. And you can bet my blood fairly ran cold when that damned cat reared up like a demon and flew straight at her face!

"By the Lord's mercy its claws missed her eyes . . . I've always had it in mind that that young limb of Satan meant to 'a' got her blinded . . . but though it wasn't as bad as that, it was quite bad enough. The brute's claws tore one eyebrow open and she staggered back, half blinded with her own blood, flinging out her arms to fight the creature off—but she caught her foot in her long skirt, and in doing it she somehow got turned sideways, lost her balance and came hurtling down the stairs! She landed on her head in the hall and lay like a stone—and if you'd seen the

look on Master Patrick's face as he looked down at her as she lay at his feet, you'd know I was telling you the plain truth. Gloating, sir . . . fair gloating! Of course there was a frightful how-d'ye-do, and the cat was drowned, and Miss Cathie had the best doctors that could be got, but it was all no use. She got over it . . . but she'd broken her hip-bone, and she'll walk lame, as you see, all the rest of her life."

"Of course," I said cautiously, "there's no proof that that was due to him? Cats have been known to go temporarily mad in hot weather."

"I know," said Hammond. "But if you'd lived with him, sir—and *watched* him, same as I have, you wouldn't have no doubts. And that's not the only story I could tell you. I remember soon after he first came, when he wasn't no more'n about four, he was caught putting nettles into the Weddell baby's crib, and Big Ned, Farmer Edge's son, picked him up and spanked him till he squawked. And that night a chunk of tiling from the porch over the farmhouse door crashed down on Ned and knocked him flat, and he's never been right in his head since. And you can call that coincidence *if* you like—and so did we, *then!* But it's happened too often to be coincidence *all* the time! Sure as a gun, if Master Patrick's crossed, and especially if he's struck, *something* nasty'll happen to whoever touches him—so the whole village leaves him alone. The Vicar hung on longest, and talked of the power of the Church and all, and the ladies used to go regularly to St. Aidan's down in the village—especially Madam, it seemed to comfort her. But it's three years since they went, and the Vicar never sets foot in the Manor House now."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, it was after another school—there's been lots of 'em!—had sent Master Patrick back saying they didn't want him," said Hammond. "And the Reverend offered to take him with his own boy and three or four others in special classes—he's a great scholar, is Mr. Wakely, and makes quite a bit of money doing what they call private coaching. But he hadn't had my lord more than two or three months when he brought him back late one night with one hand on his shoulder and his mouth set grim—and for once Master Patrick looked a bit scared too, and was I glad!"

"What was it all about?" I asked curiously.

Hammond had the grace to blush.

"I suppose I shouldn't 'a' listened," he said. "But they were in the drawing-room—the ladies were waiting for Master Patrick to come in, and Madam was a bit fussed because it was after eleven, and he's not often out so late. And I didn't like to lock up till he *was* in, and when I let the Vicar in with him, marchin' him in like a prisoner, well . . . I waited about to show his Reverence off, and I couldn't help but hear. Seems one night Mrs. Wakely—that's the Vicar's wife—took it into her head to have a look at Master Eddy, him having a cold or some such, on her way up to bed. Him being the one-and-only, naturally she fretted a bit about him . . . and he wasn't there! So she came rushing downstairs in a regular fantigue to get hold of the Vicar. Now, Vicar was taking his final stroll in the garden before turning in, and for once he took it into his head to go right down to the bottom of the garden, by the orchard, instead of just strolling round the lawn—and he heard voices and saw some funny-looking lights in the meadow beyond the orchard.

"He thought it might be gipsies, so he went quietlike and looked over the hedge, and there he saw his own Master Eddy sitting in the middle of one of them Rings the locals call Fairy Dancing Floors! He was staring in front of him like a dummy, all white and fixed, and that Master Patrick and *some others*—though the Vicar couldn't rightly see just what they were, he knew they weren't right things, they was dark and lean and had funny lights on their heads—and they were all dancing widder-shins, if you know what that means, sir?"

"I do!" I said grimly. "But go on. . . ."

"Well, the Vicar saw red and either jumped over the hedge or crashed through it—he's a big strong gentleman for all he's over fifty—and seized hold of Master Patrick, and there was a sort of whistle in the air and them *others* was gone in a flash, and just then Mrs. Wakely came screaming down the garden and Master Patrick said something quick-like and Master Eddy woke up—though he'd been sitting still as a stone staring in front of him, in spite of his father bouncing over the hedge! So it's plain there was some funny business going on if he couldn't wake till Master Patrick told him."

"Funny business is the word all right," I said. "And then?"

"Well," said Hammond. "After that, Vicar brought his lordship back here and told his mother and aunt the whole thing, with *him* sitting and glowering on a stool between 'em—Madam crying like a pump, poor lady, and Miss Cathie sitting looking

frozen, and Vicar talking about dabbling with the powers of evil and quoting yards of Latin what I couldn't make head nor tail of. . . . And when the Vicar stumped off at last it was plain it was all over with any goings and comings between the Vicarage and here. And maybe you'll say that it's just another coincidence that less than a month later there was a fire in the Vicar's study—*only* in his study!—that burnt up a whole lot of valuable books and curios he'd got there, and worst of all, the manuscript of a big book he'd been working on for years, together with the notes and stuff so he couldn't ever rewrite it!" He drew a long breath. "Lord, sir, I could tell you scores of other tales, if I'd the time, about him and his nasty slimy ways. But I hope I said enough anyway to put you on your guard, sir, to prove that I'm not just pitching a tale when I say there's something queer—*very* queer—about Master Patrick. You start from where I left off, sir, and go on. You'll find plenty!"

Hammond was right—I *did* find plenty. A good deal of it was impossible to check and corroborate, of course, and there was much that I had to dismiss as either sheer invention or gross exaggeration—but out of the rest there emerged enough to prove that the boy Patrick was undoubtedly the core, the central focus around which revolved a whole list of ugly tales, adventures, episodes, incidents and whatnot. Some merely childishly unpleasant, showing a twisted sort of prankishness, but there was a sinister percentage that seemed to show a mind or force definitely evil, inimical towards humanity, deliberately using its powers, whatever they were, for its own macabre ends, and rejoicing in its power and the helplessness of those who feared it. It was quite plain that Master Patrick had got the entire village, besides his mother and the staff of the Manor House, entirely under his thumb. They dreaded and feared him without in the least knowing what they feared, and he walked amongst them alone, accompanied only by the shadow of their fear and hate, and he seemed to rejoice in that loneliness, to bask and smile in the sense of power that it gave him. . . .

Only three people stood out against him. Myself, Hammond, and his aunt Miss Cargill. And while he watched me as yet guardedly, not sure of his ground or of me, and Hammond he affected to deride, he hated his aunt with a hatred very definite and most unchildlike—and this hate was presently to show itself in a manner both startling and unpleasant.

After the tragic episode of Molly and Bert Master Patrick was

remarkably quiet and obedient for some days—the tiger temporarily sated, I wondered? and kicked myself for being melodramatic! He came regularly in to meals, did his lessons, and behaved towards his mother, his aunt and myself with impeccable politeness. He even, on hearing the news that George—who, thanks to an assiduous doctor and a strong constitution, did *not* die—insisted upon marrying Molly and shouldering the responsibility of Bert's child, suggested giving the girl a pound out of his pocket-money as a wedding-present. He was loudly applauded by his mother for his generosity—but as he went out of the room to carry out his suggestion, Hammond went softly after him, and I was just near enough to hear the dialogue between them.

"If you've got the bleeding cheek to go near that girl, let alone offer her that damn money after what you have done to her," said Hammond fiercely, "I'll wait till I get a chance and pretty well break your ruddy neck. D'ye hear?"

The boy looked up into the angry face of the man, scowled and hesitated. Whatever dwelt behind that round ingenuous face—and I knew now it was a soul evil, old as the hills and quite without the ordinary human sensitiveness to love, kindness, affection—was longing to deride him, to challenge and defy! But the body that housed it was still that of a small boy, and could suffer pain and indignity just as the bodies of ordinary boys may suffer, and Hammond was a sturdy fellow, standing well on to six feet high. So at last Patrick shrugged his shoulders, gave a malicious little grin, thrust the note back into his pocket and turned away.

"What are you making such a fuss about, Hammond?" he said airily. "If you like to prevent Molly having a quid to spend, I don't care—it's her loss. But why are you doing the gallant-protector act? I suppose we aren't all on the wrong track and it's your baby after all?"

And while Hammond was fuming at the insult, he strolled whistling back to the drawing-room.

Shortly after this I made an interesting discovery. Evidently tired of trying to pierce the protective "ring" that I built about myself every night, the young man let me alone after a while—and I was able to set a watch on him for a change!

I discovered that he frequently left his bedroom at night—without his mother's knowledge, of course; he had perfected a method of climbing out of his window over the balcony rail and sliding down a penthouse roof that stretched below it, by means

of a knotted rope that he kept hidden somewhere in his room, and departing into the night, returning sometimes hours later with leaves and twigs in his curly hair and his pyjamas damp with dew and green with moss. He would climb up, helped by his rope, and regain his room—but sometimes he would linger on the balcony outside, staring out over the garden with eyes alight with that uncanny brightness, singing to himself under his breath and laughing now and then, quiet, unpleasant laughter. Several nights I watched him go and come . . . my room was on a level with his, though it had no balcony . . . and once or twice I was by no means sure that he returned alone. At any rate, two or three times as he came up from the belt of trees that stretched across the fields just below where the garden ended, a small dark figure walking slowly through the silver dawn mist, I got the impression that beside him came . . . others. Flickering, intangible shadows that faded and vanished into the mist as he approached the house. . . .

I made use of one of these nightly absences to have a look round his room while he was away. He always locked it carefully behind him, but that was no hindrance to me—as you know, there is nothing in the trick of making a skeleton key once you have been taught!—and I found several things that interested me greatly during my search. First, I found his sketch-book . . . and its contents startled me! I had expected, from the pains he had taken to keep it out of my way, that he probably shared the usual young boy's liking for making drawings of a more or less "smutty" type—but I got a considerable surprise. The pages were covered with scribbled sketches—mostly ordinary things enough, scenes, geometric designs, one or two portrait heads, including one of Molly and another of Bert, the gipsy, a group of flowers, a fanciful pair of figures . . . but somehow, though it is quite impossible to explain quite *how*, they were—evil! Uncanny and horrible, as though the ordinary pleasant shapes and forms of life were seen through a twisted vision . . . I don't mean to say they were foul and obscene, though there was a hint of this aspect, too, about them. But it was not a *sexual* sort of obscenity—more a mental, though this is difficult to describe in words. I mean that they were drawings done by a mind entirely removed from the human. A mind that held within its eerie byways strange twists and turns down which the normal, ordinary mind would never, could never dream of wandering. . . .

I flicked hastily over the pages—and just before the end came upon three drawings more carefully executed than any of the others. One was a rough sketch of a landscape, a wild, untamed mountain-side with a stream in the foreground, and on the further side of the stream a mass of tangled bushes, and behind them a high-curving bank, like a curling wave, crowned with two great trees. Beneath this was written the mysterious words "*Dail-sheomra ruit Sidhe*".¹ The second was a flight of arrowy figures, lean, graceful, eerie, merely indicated and yet profoundly and disturbingly vivid—and the third was a sketch of a head. But what a head! Though it was a mere tangled mass of lines that formed hair, and a vague shadowy face that was narrow and foxy, its eyes, even as mere pencilled scribbles, made something in one curl and shrink! Under these last two drawings, as under the first, were two or three lines of strange characters—I studied them for a moment and recognized them as Gaelic. "*An Ciar*"² was written beneath the head, and beneath the drawing of the flying figures "*Nai aluinn an sluagh Sidhe ar mhuin na gaoithe*".³

I spelt them out slowly—I knew a little Gaelic, through my Scottish grandmother—and stared, astonished. This from the lad who seemed to dislike the very name of Ireland? I felt I was hot on the track of something, and putting the sketch-book carefully back where I had found it, rummaged further. My discoveries were interesting. I found a dictionary of Celtic words and phrases, a scribbled book in which he had obviously laboriously tried to set himself exercises in the ancient Irish tongue, two or three books on Irish folk-lore and history, pictures and photographs of Irish beauty spots . . . and all this from a boy who declared that he hated Ireland!

This puzzled me so much that next day I went straight to Miss Cargill and tackled her.

"Look here, Miss Cargill," I said, "if you remember, I didn't want you to tell me too much at the outset; but I've been here several weeks now and gathered quite a lot—and now I want you to tell me, please, all you can about Patrick—and Ireland."

She looked puzzled.

"I shouldn't have thought he had much connection with Ireland," she began. "He was only five when he left the

¹ "The Council Room of the Shee."

² "The Dark One."

³ "How beautiful are the Shee, as they ride the winds."

country, and he remembers so little about the place that he never even speaks about it. He used to have a violent antipathy to any idea of returning there, certainly, that used to puzzle me and my sister a good deal—why a mere child should take a dislike to a country he left at five years old seems absurd, but so it was. But now I think the antipathy has given place to plain boredom. He simply doesn't take any interest in Ireland any more."

"That is pure camouflage—for some reason," I told her, and went on to recount my discoveries in his room.

She was startled and interested.

"Then you think . . ."

"I don't think anything positive as yet," I said, "but the care with which he hides his secret passionate interest in Ireland means *something*—and I want to get at what it means. Hate of a thing is often only an inverted form of love, you know. It may easily mean that Ireland means a great deal to him—so much that he daren't admit it even to himself. Go on, please. I want to go back to the root of things—before Patrick was born."

We had an interesting and informative talk. Miss Cargill told me the story of her sister's marriage—a marriage that had taken place sorely against their parents' will, as Dick Flaherty, though a good-hearted fellow enough and handsome in a flashy, dashing style, was only a bookmaker, and not a very successful bookmaker at that, and the match was considered a terrible *mésalliance* for pretty Agnes Cargill, younger daughter of a wealthy north-country business man.

Mr. and Mrs. Cargill resisted the idea for as long as they could, and for some time successfully, as Dick Flaherty had nothing to offer beyond a family name that he boasted ranked amongst the best in Ireland—and in point of fact Dick Flaherty, despite his flamboyant vulgarity and race-course standards of life and living, was actually an offshoot of a good old Irish family, though so minor an offshoot, and so far away from the regular line of succession to the family estate, that any idea of inheriting it had never entered his head. And yet, after the fashion of such things, that is actually what happened! The Cargill parents were still trying to persuade their daughter to break off her engagement when three unexpected deaths left the way free for Dick Flaherty to inherit the family estate, Killeen, a handsome property in County Kerry. The Cargills, dismayed, found their strongest arguments against the marriage silenced, and Agnes was led triumphantly to the altar by her swaggering Irish groom.

Apparently little Mrs. Flaherty had not been too anxious to go to live in Ireland, and her parents urged her husband to sell or let the place and get a nice farm somewhere on the outskirts of Oxford so that they could keep in touch with their daughter . . . but that did not suit Flaherty at all. He was all agog to take his place amongst the nobs, he said—where he'd always belonged by rights, as he'd told them, and bejabbers he was right, for all they'd thought him a liar! Was it now that he'd the chance to hold up his head to his own place, run his own horses and drink his own whisky, that he'd stand back? Not he! So off to Killeen they went, and shortly afterwards old Mr. and Mrs. Cargill died, within a short time of each other—their deaths hastened by worry about their daughter, so rumour said—and there was left only Catherine to go to her sister's help when the advent of the baby was announced. . . .

"What sort of a success was Flaherty in Ireland?" I asked.

Miss Cargill pursed her lips and shook her head.

"Directly I got there," she said, "I knew the whole thing was a miserable flop. The 'gentry' wouldn't have Dick Flaherty at any price, and Dick was only staying on out of a mixture of defiance and refusal to admit failure. He was drinking heavily too, and poor Aggie was dreadfully unhappy. . . ."

"Did he ill-treat her?" I asked.

"Oh *no*!" Miss Cargill assured me at once. "On the contrary, he adored her, and one of his special hates against the neighbours was that they 'treated his wife like dirt when she was worth a million of them'. But poor, stupid, well-meaning Dick would never, and *did* never, see that the whole thing was his own fault."

"Had people cold-shouldered him from the very beginning?" I asked.

"Not entirely," said Miss Cargill. "Irish society is pretty hard up, and Aggie had plenty of money, and Killeen was a charming place, and they held open house—heaps of drinks, parties, cards, gambling, and so on—so at first plenty of people rallied round them. And of course everybody was glad the place was to be carried on by a Flaherty, even if he were rather an odd specimen! But Dick was one of those maddening people who *must* boast and swank and try to throw their weight about—you know the type—and he couldn't keep his temper when he got drunk, either, which he did very easily. He was the sort of man who always went about with a chip on his shoulder—I think

that having been a bookmaker, he got an inferiority-complex when he found himself amongst a lot of 'landed gentry' and exaggerated this aggressive manner just to hide it." She sighed. "So after a while 'society' decided he was totally impossible and left him severely alone, and then, of course, in a fury he flew off at a tangent, back to his old crowd, the gambling and racing, horsy set, and Killeen was filled with a mob of race-course toughs and their women, and poor Aggie simply hated them all! She used to take refuge with the peasants and cottagers on the estate—they liked her, but they had no time for Dick. The lower classes are quicker than anybody to spot a fake . . . and for all his boasted Flaherty blood, poor Dick was only a 'fake' gentleman, and the peasantry simply ignored him. Dick spent a long and very expensive year trying to 'get back' on local society for snubbing him, and when he was refused membership of the local golf club, that was the last straw—Aggie told me he stamped up and down the room, hysterical with rage, and swore that he'd be even with 'em! If his countrymen wouldn't have him, he'd bring his own friends over from England, by God, and be independent of 'em! He'd turn the house into an English Club! There was shooting and fishing in plenty on his property. And more than that, if he couldn't play golf on their damn links, he'd lay out a nine-hole course on his own land that should be the envy of those bloody Irish, and *that* would show 'em!

"When I arrived," she went on, "they were more or less isolated. People were coolly polite to them when they had to meet, but nobody would speak to them if they could avoid it—poor Aggie was looking dreadfully white and depressed, and nearly cried with joy at seeing me. Dick's racing friends had grown tired of Killeen after a while and departed, and Aggie had been alone with Dick, surly and morose and drinking harder than he should, for weeks and weeks, with nobody but the servants and the cottagers to speak to. And the baby was due in a few weeks' time. . . ." She heaved a sigh. "Poor Aggie, I felt so sorry for her! But after I'd been there a day or so and we were deep in plans for the coming baby, she cheered up a lot and we frankly didn't bother about Dick, who was engrossed in his plans for the new golf-course. I'd got Hammond and my own car with me, so we were independent. . . ."

"Tell me a little about Hammond?" I said.

"Oh, he was first of all bootboy in our house, before Agnes was married," Miss Cargill said, "and later on he learnt house-

work and valeted my father, and when my father and mother died I had him taught to drive a car and made him my chauffeur. He's the most faithful fellow—would do anything for either of us. But of course his real devotion is to Agnes . . . always has been."

I nodded. I remembered the gleam in the good fellow's eyes as he said "the nicest lady God ever put breath into!"

"Go on—I understand," I said. "Tell me—was there anything at all unusual about Patrick when he was born?"

"Not a thing," said Miss Cargill emphatically. "He was a sweet, placid, normal sort of baby—*completely* ordinary! Well, I stayed at Killeen until he was about eight months old, and then I went off with Hammond on a tour of the world, which I'd always wanted to do, and that kept me wandering about for about two years. I didn't hurry. I was alone in the world and had plenty of money, and though I worried about Aggie rather from time to time, I couldn't live with them indefinitely. Man and wife must thrash out their troubles together in the long run. . . .

"Well, at last I came back to London and took a flat, and while it was being decorated and got ready I ran over to Ireland again to see Aggie. . . . Patrick was then getting on for three years old, and a chubby, jolly little fellow, as normal as could be, and the greatest comfort to Aggie, I could see. She was far from being either well or happy. The golf-course—after incredible delays and difficulties—was approaching completion, and the English Club had been launched, but *that* venture had not proved a success. A few of Dick's raffish old-time friends had bothered to come over, plus a sprinkling of Americans and *nouveaux riches*, most of whom treated Aggie like a super-housekeeper; but they evidently hadn't found life at Killeen sufficiently amusing to want to come again, and as a result, embittered by this last failure, Dick was drinking harder than ever and looking shockingly old and changed. His old swaggering gaiety had given place to a queer sort of half-defiant aggressiveness, and he was terribly nervy, used to jump and fly into a fearful rage if anything startled him, if a door slammed, a dish was dropped, even sometimes at the ringing of the telephone bell—though they were so cold-shouldered by their neighbours now that it was very rarely that anybody rang them up! I didn't stay very long, as I felt so indignant with Dick for letting himself go to pieces so and making Agnes unhappy that I'm afraid I let him see it, and we had

some unpleasant quarrels . . . so, as Aggie still loved him and scenes between us made her suffer acutely, I cut my visit short and came back to London.

"I didn't go to Killeen again. I had a nice flat and an interesting life of my own in London, I entertained a good deal and went abroad a good deal, and so things went on for about two years. I heard often from my sister, of course, but I gathered from her letters that there was no change there—things were just dragging on, and Patrick the only creature that made life worth living at all. Then suddenly I got a telegram from her telling me that Dick had been killed in a car-accident, and she was coming to England just as soon as she could get away! I hurried to Holyhead to meet them, and I shall never forget the look I saw flash into my sister's eyes as she came down the gangway towards me from the boat—a sort of fear and protectiveness at once—and when the child stepped ashore, holding his mother's hand, and looked at me, I got a shock like a cold chill! He was just five years old then, and it was the same chubby little fair face, the same blue eyes . . . but that which looked out from them was . . . *different!* Different—and uncanny to a degree."

"Whatever happened to cause the change?" I said. "Have you ever tried to find out from your sister how it came about, or anything about it?"

Miss Cargill nodded.

"Of course I have!" she said with a trace of scorn. "At first, poor soul, she denied hotly that there *was* any change . . . naturally, she would. But when we took this house and settled down and she slipped gradually back into the old familiar rôle of my little sister, she began to relax that fiercely-protective attitude—and at last, after some time, she broke down and admitted that she knew that Patrick was changed. But how and what had changed him she simply had no idea! He was, she said, a perfectly normal little boy—a darling—until he was about four years old. It sounds crazy, but she said it happened almost overnight. She'd been away with Dick in Dublin for a few days to do some shopping—and when she came back, to use her own words, 'something else looked up at me out of my baby's eyes! Something that wasn't . . . human!'"

I frowned.

"That's a bit vague," I commented. "Can't you give me anything more definite?"

"Lots!" said Miss Cargill crisply. "But of course it wasn't

for some time that Aggie began to sort out the details, as it were. Patrick had been a merry, chattering sort of little fellow, friendly with everybody, loving to be petted, enjoying games and sweets and toys, and adoring animals, especially dogs . . . he had a puppy of his own, and they used to play together, Aggie told me, all day long, and were never separated. But after she and Dick returned from Dublin the puppy wouldn't go near Patrick again! Used to howl and bolt when he approached it . . . and from being happy, gay and friendly to all the world, the child was either sly or malicious, or in other moods as silent and morose as a little monk. He disliked being with people—used to dodge even his parents, instead of running to meet them, and instead of playing with the village children as he used to do, he took to creeping away alone, to sit playing and murmuring to himself in a corner, or lie staring vaguely at the fire, or up to the sky. While he simply wouldn't *look* any more at the toys he used to play with, and squirmed away from Aggie's arms when she picked him up to kiss him . . . and if you don't think that, in a child of only about four years old, is a profound change, well, *I* do!"

"I agree with you," I said sincerely. "I take it that this mysterious change took place before his father's death?"

"Oh yes, before," said Miss Cargill. "Aggie told me it was six months or so before Dick's death that it happened. It happened shortly after I left them, actually—just after the completion of the golf-course at Killeen."

An odd little feeling seized me as she spoke the last words—a feeling as though one of the leading pieces in the mental jigsaw puzzle with which I had been struggling ever since I had accepted the Flaherty case had fallen suddenly into place. The whole picture was still in a hopeless state of chaos, but a vital central piece was found and in position. . . .

"How did Dick Flaherty take the change in his son?" I asked. "Did he notice it? And what were the symptoms, so to speak?"

"Aggie won't tell me much about that," said Miss Cargill. "But I gather Dick *did* notice it after a while—and feared it. Though it sounds crazy, Aggie swears that after the 'change' came, even at that age, when he was only four, that child could make one feel the power of his eyes! He was only a tiny boy, but sometimes he'd be playing with his bricks or soldiers on the mat before the fire, and he used to look up and stare at his father, sprawling half-drunk in a chair, until Dick used to stare

at him back and suddenly rouse himself and shudder and yell at Aggie that she'd given him a devil's brat, and rush like mad out of the room! After the change came Aggie told me she kept the child away from Dick as much as she could . . . and then, a few months later, Dick died."

"How did Flaherty die?" I asked.

"Now," said Miss Cargill, "that's another mystery—at least, according to the villagers at Killeen! He was a first-class driver and he was trying out a new car, in perfect condition on a lovely day, roads as dry as a bone . . . he was driving down the lane that swings round a corner of his property, and for some reason the car skidded, ran full tilt into a tree and somersaulted clean over on to the golf-course, pitching Dick out like a slung shot! They found him sprawling on one of the bunkers, stone dead, with his neck broken—and of course the general conclusion was that he'd been drinking and lost his head. Poor Aggie sent me a frantic wire, put a caretaker and her daughter in charge of Killeen House, and came back to England and sanity . . . or so she thought! So there you have the beginning of the story—for what it's worth."

"It's worth more to me than you probably know," I said. "I've got some gleams of light stirring at last—and I've been fumbling pretty well in the dark, I don't mind telling you, until now! But now I know at least the next step we must take—we must go to Killeen!"

Miss Cargill looked startled.

"Killeen?" she said. "Yes, of course I see the sense of that—go back to where it all started, eh? But I think we'll have a lot of difficulty with Patrick—he won't want to go."

"Then for once his mother must be firm," I said. "Will you tell her I said so? Something in Ireland caused the malady, and in Ireland lies the cure—and if I'm to find the cure, I must discover the cause. Surely she will see that?"

Miss Cargill nodded.

"She shall!" she said firmly. "I'll see to that. We'll go to Ireland, just as soon as we can get packed."

Miss Cargill certainly wasted no time. That very night she opened the attack. We were half-way through dinner, and Patrick with us for once—which was probably one of the reasons she seized the opportunity—when she said with an admirable appearance of casualness:

"How long is it since you last went over to Killeen, Aggie?"

Mrs. Flaherty's mouth and eyes opened in surprise—and she paused in her eating to stare at her sister. I saw, too, the child Patrick stop eating and turn his eyes upon his aunt—eyes lowered, cautious, but with a gleam in them that might mean anger—or alarm.

"I—why, I've only been once since Dick died. That's about four years ago when you had your accident. Don't you remember, there was all that bother about getting my consent to driving a new road across a corner of the property? Why?"

"Then," said Miss Cargill, "I think it's about time you went again! We've all been very remiss over things out there, I think—we should have gone there more often. No use leaving the care of a valuable estate to an agent who only goes there twice a year, and an old caretaker and her daughter."

Mrs. Flaherty was white to the ears and staring at her sister, but Miss Cargill went smoothly on.

"And there's another thing! After all, Aggie, Killeen is Patrick's inheritance. He is the last of the Flahertys, so it is only right that he should get to see something of his own country and his own people, let alone the property that will be his."

There was a small sound like a snarl from the boy. He had laid down his knife and fork and was shivering violently. The eyes he turned upon his aunt were wide and alive with venom.

"I . . ." he whispered, "I won't go! You can't make me, I won't go. . . ."

Mrs. Flaherty broke in with a nervous, almost hysterical laugh.

"Oh, you must be joking, Cathie! You know how Pat hates Ireland."

"It's odd that he should do that," I said, watching the boy as I spoke. "After all, he *is* Irish, isn't he? Flaherty couldn't be anything but an Irish name . . ."

Patrick snarled again—there is no other way to describe the way in which he drew his breath between his teeth and stared at me.

"My name!" he said, and his voice suddenly sounded quite different, much older and more resonant, so that we all started. "What rot is this about my name? It's Irish—but it's not Flaherty. It's . . . it's . . ."

He paused and seemed to gag and stifle, as though trying to finish his speech, then with a sharp jerk he sprang to his feet and darted out of the room. We sat transfixed, staring at each other,

then Miss Cargill pulled herself together and addressed the thunderstruck Hammond.

"We'll go on with dinner, I think," she said steadily. "And afterwards, Aggie, we will discuss how soon we can get to Ireland. . . ."

I left the ladies together for a while after dinner, and when ultimately I joined them I noticed that Mrs. Flaherty's eyes were red-rimmed; she excused herself on my entrance and went up to her room, and Miss Cargill and I went out to take our coffee on the verandah, for now June had passed into July and the nights were warm and lovely, so that one spent as much time as one could sitting out of doors revelling in the gorgeous display of coolness in the sunset and enjoying the delicious country air.

Patrick had not appeared since his hurried exit from the dining-room, but still he might be lurking near—one never knew—so we confined our conversation to ordinary topics, books, politics, the theatre and so on. I always found Miss Cargill a stimulating and interesting companion, and was thoroughly enjoying myself when Patrick appeared round the corner of the house, silent as a shadow, sat himself down upon the top step, with his back against one of the wooden posts that supported the awning overhead, and appeared to sink into a sort of reverie, hunched upon the step, hands in pockets, his profile towards us, staring towards where the sunset made a flaming background for a slender little moon.

I glanced at the boy, and then at my companion—she answered my glance with a nod, drew the handsome black lace scarf she wore closer about her and rose to her feet.

"I'm going to take a stroll down to the lake before I go to bed," she said aloud. "Good night, Mr. Pennoyer—and good night, Patrick. By the time I come back you ought to be in bed."

The boy vouchsafed no answer, but sat hunched and still as before, as the lady passed down the steps beside him and moved away, with her slightly halting walk, down the long green slope of the lawn.

A silence fell, broken only by the faint whirring of the bats as they darted in and out of the clustering roses and jasmine that climbed up the thick wooden posts of the verandah and hung from the eaves and balconies above like heavy scented pelmets.

I lay back meditating and listening to the eerie sound of their flight, every now and then glancing at the motionless figure of

the mysterious little boy who was my charge. Should I speak to him or not?

I determined to make an effort at any rate.

"Patrick," I called. "Come over and talk to me now that your aunt's left me all alone."

He turned his head and looked at me, and in the ruddy-gold light of the sunset I saw a queer derisive smile cross his face.

"I like being alone," he said. "Don't you like being alone, Mr. Pennoyer?"

"Of course I do, at times," I said. "But at the moment I'd like to talk to you."

He rose reluctantly, came over to me and stood with his hands in his pockets, leaning against the arm of the chair his aunt had occupied as I began to talk to him, exerting all the charm and sweet reasonableness I possessed. I talked to him about our coming visit to Ireland . . . I knew it was best to take the bull by the horns and treat the whole thing as ordinarily as possible. I said how surprising it was that he had not shown more interest in the land of his birth; pointed out that as he would be a land-owner on quite a considerable scale, this visit to his property, from his own point of view, as well as his mother's, was really long overdue, and I was going on generalizing about what a lovely country I knew it was and how much personally I was looking forward to visiting it, when he surprised me by laughing, a low, amused little laugh.

"You think you're awfully clever, don't you, Mr. Pennoyer?" was his comment.

"I don't know about that," I said with as much nonchalance as I could summon, "but I know that I know a great deal more than you know, young man!"

He laughed again.

"You don't know *what* I know!" he said, and I was silent, for it was true.

He went on reflectively.

"And I know you know that I *do*—what you call 'show interest'—in Ireland. You saw my books! You went into my room the other night and looked through them."

I was silent from sheer astonishment as he went on, a faint flavour of contempt in his light boyish voice, "Do you think I couldn't *feel* you'd handled them, the very next time I took them out?"

I had nothing to say—I was too amazed to find that this un-

canny eleven-year-old could sense an alien touch upon his personal possessions as instantly as I, with my highly-trained powers, could do. Truly the mystery of this boy waxed deeper and deeper the more I delved into it! I answered as normally as I could:

"Yes, I examined some of your things, Patrick—not out of curiosity, but because I want to help you."

He shrugged his shoulders and frowned.

"Help . . . I don't know what you mean. I don't want any help! I am quite happy." He glanced round him, and that sinister smile once again crossed his open, childish face. "You've no idea what fun I have—what fun it is to pull strings and set people against each other and make them do what they don't want to do! It is going to be *much* greater fun when I grow up—when I'm a man. I'm only a little boy now, but you wait!" The evil of his grin grew more intense. "I might lose it—that funny power I've got . . . if I went to Ireland, especially if I went with you. I'll tell you a secret. I've *always* been frightened of going back to Ireland . . . of anything to do with Ireland . . . because of that. Because there's *something* there I don't understand . . . something that calls me, and that I want to go back to, and yet at the same time I don't! I don't know how or why, but I've got a feeling . . . a feeling that if I went back to Ireland and met that *something*, I might *lose* myself, though that sounds silly, doesn't it?" He slanted an uncanny glance at me. "You'd be glad if I were to lose myself . . . wouldn't you, Mr. Pennoyer?"

I looked straight at him.

"I could tell you that better if I knew just who '*you*' were, Patrick," I said deliberately. "I don't know . . . yet. But you are quite right in suspecting that I suggested this move to Ireland because out there I hope to find out just who you are!" I fixed his shifty gaze imperiously. "And why you are here. . . ."

He moved restlessly, fretfully, a step or two along the verandah. Already his quicksilver attention was away. . . .

"I can't think why you don't leave me alone, all of you," he muttered. "And specially I can't think why *you* came? You aren't like an ordinary tutor! I've done nothing to you . . . yet." He giggled, and the sound, while childish enough, had an unpleasant note in it. "But I *could*, you know . . . I could! When people really make me angry with them . . . Aunt Cathie, for instance. . . ."

He checked himself suddenly and there was a long pause, while

the bats, lulled into security by the momentary silence, swung out again in their aery dance against the stars. Suddenly the boy turned, held out both arms and uttered a low, queer call beneath his breath—and, lo, as though moved by one common impulse, the bats whirled aloft, and descending like a dark cloud, settled upon his outflung arms as pigeons settle upon the hands of those who feed them! He looked down at me and laughed a little arrogant laugh.

“You think I’m lonely—but these, and lots of others, they are my friends! I can do what I want with them—they obey my words, they do what I tell them. I . . .”

He stopped abruptly and drew his hands into his breast, the bats still clinging, like a grotesque black patterning, to the sleeves and shoulders of his blue linen shirt, and walked down the steps to the lawn below. There he stood for a few minutes with bent head, seeming to whisper and talk to the clustering creatures—then suddenly, flinging both arms wide, he released them. Like a cloud of black gnats, sharply silhouetted against the fading reds and ambers and coral-pink of the sky, they swept off and away down the lawn in the direction of the distant trees—and Patrick, whistling, turned and walked off round the corner of the house without another glance in my direction.

I sat brooding in silence for a moment, staring before me—then suddenly one of those impulses that, thank heaven, I had by that time learnt to obey without analysing them, seized me. Rising, I ran down the verandah steps and down the lawn after Miss Cargill, through the little plantation of flowering trees that in the lowering dusk made a starry patterning, with their foam of pale blossoms, against the belt of darkness that was the strip of woodland on the far side of the fence, jumped the fence, and plunged into the green-scented dusk beneath the trees. The wood, and the little spring-fed lake that it concealed, was a favourite haunt of the ladies in hot weather, and a well-worn footpath led from the garden, winding between the close-growing tree-trunks to the edge of the water on the far side of the copse. Fortunately I had been there several times with the two sisters so knew my way, though it was very dark in the shadow of the trees. I hurried along, calling urgently as I ran, “Miss Cargill, Miss Cargill!”—but there was no reply, and when I came to the verge of the lake, at first I saw no sign of the lady I sought.

The lake lay glimmering quietly in the moonlight, a small oval-

shaped sheet of water, set in a heavy frame of trees. Here and there, scattered water-lilies, floating on their palette-shaped leaves, held up porcelain-white cups to the sunset, and at the further end of the lake, at the foot of the trees, a mass of sturdy bulrushes thrust their tall, brown-velvet spearheads upwards . . . and it was there, after a few minutes' frantic search, that I found Miss Cargill, just in time! She had fainted and fallen face downwards into the water amongst the bulrushes, and I had some difficulty, indeed, in dragging her out without falling in myself—but within a few minutes she lay gasping and dripping on the bank, white, but safe and smiling, and heartily I thanked the impulse that had once again guided me rightly. Her story, when she recovered sufficiently to tell it to me, turned me cold, though fortunately she did not guess its real inwardness, and needless to say, I did not tell her. . . .

It appeared that she had been walking idly along the steep bank near the bulrushes, watching the lovely effect of the sunset colours reflected on the lily-patterned water, when she had been conscious of a group of bats, flitting, in their aery, inconsequential dance, in and out of the tree-trunks beside her. She had paused to watch them, loving the delicate swiftness and grace of their movement, when suddenly they "attacked" her—that was the expression she used! Flew into her face, into her hair, beating their tiny wings fiercely, blinding her, terrifying her, and all the time uttering their pencil-shrill whistling squeaks, like miniature furies, and the poor woman, startled and terrified beyond words, had stepped back, slipped and fallen in amongst the rushes in the deepest part of the pool. . . .

I had no difficulty in guessing what instructions Patrick Flaherty had given to his—friends!

Indeed it was time—and more than time—that the nettle of this mystery was grasped. . . .

Patrick was so startled at the sight of his aunt in her usual place at breakfast—I admit to enjoying the sight of his pop-eyes and open mouth as he entered the breakfast-room!—that he made no further demur about going to Ireland, and within a week we were off.

We took Hammond and the car over with us, as apparently Killeen village and Killeen House were miles from any station; and ultimately, after a long trek by car through glorious green country over roads anything but glorious, we arrived at the gates

of a large estate, and turned into a wide drive that ran, gently rising upwards all the time, through a wide and well-wooded stretch of parkland.

The place had obviously been allowed to run badly to seed, for the gravel of the drive was deeply rutted and moss-grown, and the grass and undergrowth stood knee-high about the roots of magnificent old trees. Shrubs and bushes were all grown wild, and the fences in shocking disrepair, but it was a fine place enough, and when we came at last in sight of a handsome white house standing on the crest of the slope we had been climbing, I gave an exclamation of appreciation that drew a faint smile from Mrs. Flaherty. At the last bend of the drive we ran through a water-splash caused by a briskly-bubbling stream that crossed the gravel and ran off down through the park, and on reaching the front door it was opened to us by a bent old woman with a brown and wrinkled face, wearing a grey stuff dress and a large white apron. Behind her a young woman—a pale-faced, rather furtive-looking creature with black hair, wearing a blue print dress—came out to help Hammond remove the luggage from the car. I heard Mrs. Flaherty address the old woman as “Biddy O’Halloran” and the girl as “Kathleen” as she shook hands with them, and both returned her greeting with a sort of half-bob.

But I noticed—for by now there was nothing connected with Patrick Flaherty that escaped me—that neither of them approached Patrick, though they both dipped the same half-curtsy from a discreet distance, nor did he take any notice of them. A fine Irish wolf-hound came bounding out of the house and fawned affectionately upon the sisters, but he slunk away from Patrick with a faint growl, and I remembered the stories I had been told of the dislike dogs had for him.

He took no heed of dog or servants, nor did he follow his aunt and mother into the house, but turning away, walked a few yards along the wide sweep of the drive that made an arc before the entrance and stood staring at the expanse of lovely country, green and lushly beautiful as only Irish country can be, that lay before him. His brow was creased with an odd frown, half-fretful, half-puzzled—he gave the impression of somebody trying in vain to recall a thing once well known, now forgotten, and leaving Hammond and the maid to cope with the boxes, I joined him where he stood, hands in pockets, his eyes roving the scene before him. I was immensely curious to see his reactions to his birthplace, but for some moments he said nothing, merely stood silently

staring at the rich green lands, patched here and there with groups of trees, that spread before us, descending gradually to a wide sweep of rough grassy country beyond the grounds proper, and further down still to a dark stretch of peat jewelled with the glimmer of water-pools, the bog that filled the valley.

The stream that had crossed the drive meandered away down the hillside below us, a bright gleaming ribbon of water that broke here and there into a series of shallow cascades, to lose itself at last in the distant bog—and here and there, in the belt of rough country that lay between the grounds of Killeen House and the valley below, I noticed certain curious patches of vividly-green turf that looked oddly artificial. I wondered what they were, when suddenly Miss Cargill's story flashed into my mind. Of course! I was looking, I felt sure, at the last surviving remnants of the nine-hole course that poor Dick Flaherty had tried to build. Those were the greens, still standing out sharply against the rough hill-and-meadowland in which they had been set. . . .

I pointed.

"Those must be the remains of the golf-course your father made," I said.

Patrick turned and looked at me. His face was blank.

"My father?" he queried. "Why should my father build a golf-course? How idiotic. . . ."

"But of course he did," I said. "Have you forgotten? He laid out a nine-hole course here—there are the greens. They're some way off, but you can see them—or some of them, at least—quite well."

Patrick was silent a moment. I glanced down at him and saw that he was laughing. A nasty, silent little laugh that frankly puzzled me . . . but directly he saw me looking at him the smile vanished on the instant, and he gave a polite little nod.

"Oh! Yes—I see. I had forgotten."

But the conventional rejoinder was quite unconvincing, and vexed, I left the young man to his own devices and went upstairs to unpack my things. My bedroom was a pleasant, roomy chamber overlooking the park, furnished in an old-fashioned but comfortable style, with a large brass bedstead, one or two unmatched chairs, a coloured Turkish rug laid upon a polished floor, and a blue and white cotton quilt to match the blue and white china set on the old-fashioned marble-topped wash-stand. Later I found that the whole house—that is, the part of it that we were

using, as several of the larger rooms were shut up—was furnished in a similar patchwork fashion. Mrs. Flaherty had taken all the really good pieces of furniture with her when she came to live in England, and all that was left was a regular *omnium gatherum* of oddments!

I found it difficult to get unpacked, as I kept wandering to the window to stare at the magnificent view outside—wild and remote, and with a loveliness different from anything I had ever seen before. One might easily imagine strange things and strange forces moving silently about this aloof, almost uncannily beautiful spot! Nothing in it of the comfortable homely “prettiness” of the English countryside. One sensed that here one trod on alien land—a ground untouched, aloof, estranged from human life and laws. The distant purple mountains, the rolling hills with their dour dark masses of forest, the parklands that had never known plough or scythe, the wide slope of virgin land on which the links had been made, the far-off stretch of black peat, with pools of gleaming bog-waters, like a scattered handful of crystals, jade and onyx, that sprawled along the folds of the valley . . . over all these brooded an air of power not of this world.

The entrance of Hammond with an offer to finish my unpacking for me interrupted my thoughts, and I left him to his work. Going down, I met Miss Cargill in the hall with a message from Mrs. Flaherty to say that she was terribly tired and was going to bed, so we were left to explore the place together. Miss Cargill showed me round with a curious air of mingled pride and dislike—much as she admired the place, its associations had obviously spoilt it for her—but I found it a truly charming old house. There was a beautiful large drawing-room, though this was among those rooms shut up, and we were using a little morning-room instead; there was a music-room—also closed—and a small study, allotted to Patrick and to me for a school-room; and there was a library, which was, like the drawing-room and the music-room, shrouded in dust-sheets—but this I insisted upon opening, on the pretext that amongst the books I might find some useful for Patrick’s study.

Actually I was in hopes that amongst the books that had been inherited by Dick Flaherty along with Killeen House, I might find something that might help me in my task of solving the riddle of his strange little son; and after several hours of patient rummaging amongst the dusty shelves, I found a group of books on Irish legends, traditions, customs and the like that looked

promising, which I carried off at once to study at my leisure.

The first few days after our arrival passed without incident. Patrick was very quiet—indeed, we saw little of him. He spent his time out of doors, often taking a pocketful of biscuits and an apple for his lunch and staying away the entire day. I noticed that he was curiously restless in the house; prowling from one window to another, unable to settle to anything for long at a time, so I deliberately left the question of lessons on one side and sat back studying him, biding my time and continuing avidly to read up all I could about the folk-lore and history of Ireland—and especially about Killeen, the village, the house, the district. It was a part of Ireland which (Miss Cargill informed me) was peculiarly rich in old beliefs . . . superstitions as she called them, and I did not contradict her. Though is not the belief of one generation the superstition of another?

Hereabout, she said—unless things had greatly changed since she had stayed there with her sister—the peasants still believed firmly in the evil eye, in spells and runes and enchantments, in witches and wizards, leprechauns and the like! It was even said (she added reflectively) by some of the peasants that Dick Flaherty had done something to offend the fairies of the district, and that this was the reason for his death, and for the strange shadow that had fallen on his child. She suddenly produced this story one night after dinner when her sister and Patrick had both gone to bed, and startled, I sat upright, staring reproachfully at her.

“But why in the world,” I said, “didn’t you tell me that before?”

“Well, it was no more than a story circulated amongst the servants, and to tell the truth I’d entirely forgotten it till this moment,” said Miss Cargill. “Probably because we didn’t take it seriously—of course not! If we had we’d never have had a moment’s peace of mind—the maids were for ever full of something of the sort. Spooks and grave-lights, and warnings by white birds, and banshees, and I don’t know what-all. I don’t think it would have occurred to me to mention it, if I *had* remembered . . . it sounds such nonsense!”

“But you remember I said the most irrelevant and unlikely bits of information might still be useful to me!” I said—a little sourly, I admit. “Can you remember precisely *what* was said? If it seemed nonsense to you, it may not seem so to me, you know.”

Miss Cargill looked rueful.

"You'd better ask Aggie," she confessed. "She told me. As far as I remember it was some servants she overheard saying something to the effect that Dick had been 'warned', but he *would* do it, and now he'd have to take the consequences."

"'Do' it? What was he being specially insistent upon doing just then?"

"Oh," said Miss Cargill. "They must have meant that crazy laying-out of the golf-course. Everybody was talking about it, and, of course, it *was* an insane thing to do, to try and make even a miniature course on this property—all slopes and trees and bogland! It cost the earth, and everybody knew nobody would ever play on it but Dick himself and maybe one or two of his boozing friends. Aggie did her best to stop him—after all, it was her money he was spending!—but he'd got pig-headed about it, and there was no stopping him. . . ."

She stopped suddenly and looked at me with startled eyes, and my eyes were round as well. I remembered the "nudge" I had felt when I had heard that the "change" in Patrick had taken place *about the time when the golf-course was completed*.

"My goodness, I believe we're on to something? The golf-course—I believe it all hinges on that," I said.

And the next day I tackled Mrs. Flaherty to see if she could elaborate her sister's story.

She was startled, but much excited and interested. Though she confessed that in the passage of time she had forgotten the exact wording of the comments, she remembered hearing on two or three occasions that "the master'd be wise to let things alone", that he "shouldn't go diggin' up and disturbing things". He had been "warned" and if he didn't heed he must "take the consequences" . . . and it was odd, but true, that the project of the new golf-course had been amazingly unpopular with everybody around Killeen.

For some reason, from the very beginning there had been opposition from all classes of society. Deliberate and obstinate opposition, guarded from the "County", open and fierce from the villagers—though precisely why, neither Mrs. Flaherty nor her husband had been able to make out. There seemed no solid reason why a private gentleman should not, if he chose, lay out a small nine-hole golf-course on his own property! But reason or no, discouragement, obstruction, disapproval, delay surrounded Dick Flaherty from the moment he first mooted his plan—and

naturally, in a man of his type, this merely served to intensify his determination. So in the end, in spite of every difficulty, the course was made, opened and seemed launched, like the English Club that Flaherty opened at his house at the same time, on a tide of success. But after a brief initial flare-up of interest, it failed. Not even the temptation of playing on a private golf-course could attract people, it seemed, to Killeen in sufficient numbers to make it a success.

Six months afterwards the strange curse seized upon little Patrick Flaherty, and before this disaster the failure of Dick Flaherty's cherished project faded into insignificance. Alarmed and bewildered at the tragedy that had stricken his little son, Dick threw all else aside and spent his time and money sending wildly for one doctor after another—only to receive the same puzzled answer from them all.

There was nothing whatever wrong with the child, they said. He was altered in manner, tastes, in every way from what he used to be? Well, well, some children did grow up, as it were, very suddenly! That was nothing to worry about! His disposition changed? With all due respect to a mother's partiality, they would need stronger proof than just Mrs. Flaherty's assertion before accepting that! The odds were that a side of the little boy's nature that had hitherto been dormant was asserting itself, that was all. And as regards the "look in the eyes" upon which Mrs. Flaherty laid such stress, well, perhaps sometimes there *was* a certain fixed look in the eyes, a gleam, a look of age perhaps . . . but it was rank nonsense to talk about "powers of evil"! Pooh, pooh, that was ridiculous! Young children *did* show sometimes a rather curious flash of age in their expression—there was nothing in that. Physically the boy was in splendid health. Mr. and Mrs. Flaherty were disquieting themselves unnecessarily. . . .

So the doctors, in a dismal procession, pocketed their guineas and went their ways, and shortly afterwards poor blundering, boastful Dick Flaherty crashed to his tragic death, and his widow and child, leaving Killeen House to the caretaker and the cobwebs, returned to England, Miss Cargill and the Manor House.

I listened carefully, made various notes as the story unfolded itself, and my heart was thumping with excitement, for now at last I felt I had got hold of a thread that might lead me to the heart of the mystery! I thanked Mrs. Flaherty and went off to

bed, with my head full of plans and a heart considerably fuller of hope than before.

The next day, taking a certain piece of paper that I had cherished for some time in my pocket, I started off on an exploration of the derelict golf-course. It was a lovely morning, fresh and cool, with tiny clouds tearing over the high blue skies like tufts of thistledown blown before the wind, and with a sparkle in the air like wine. I felt inclined to whistle, partly through sheer happiness at such a glorious day, and partly out of the curious heady sense of excitement that always possesses me when I begin to scent a possible solution of one of my problems—I suppose a doctor of bodies feels much the same when he thinks he has diagnosed, and hopes to cure, a difficult case!

I went straight down through the wild parkland that sloped downwards from the house towards the valley, and it was fairly easy going as far as the sunken fence that marked the dividing line between the actual grounds of Killeen House and the derelict golf-course below it. Here the country was completely wild and unkempt, and but for occasional unexpected patches of finer turf, greener and more level than the rest, that I had seen from the house, patches that betrayed where once a green or a tee had been placed, one would have sworn the land was virginal, untouched.

For the best part of two hours I tramped this stretch of ground, trying to trace the main outline of the almost-obliterated links—and I rarely had a rougher journey! I stumbled over tree-roots and tussocks of rough grass, got held up by fierce thickets of brambles and thorn, twice lost my footing and slid into hidden rabbit-holes or ditches, stepped on an ants' nest and got well nipped before I could brush the brutes off, fell on my face amongst a patch of nettles, waded—or again fell—into unexpected marshy patches, as well as into the stream (which I was forced to cross two or three times), got caught on rusty lengths of barbed wire, and generally enjoyed myself at the expense of a decent tweed suit and my temper! I had more than a suspicion that I was being deliberately hindered in my progress by some force or forces that did not wish me to find out what I was determined to find out—but I struggled on.

Hole by hole, I managed to trace out Dick Flaherty's pitiful little golf-course, and marvelled at the patience and stubborn determination of the man who insisted on trying to make such a

thing against all the opposition—human, and, I was sure, inhuman also—that had been marshalled against him! It was only a small course, but had been cleverly planned to make the most of every natural hazard. Every curve and dip and angle of the difficult ground had been utilized, and though nature had done its best to obliterate poor Dick Flaherty's efforts, one could still see where they had been made. Trees had been cut down where they interfered with a clean drive, great banks or bunkers created just where they were necessary, flat spaces of ground cleared for greens . . . and even as the last thought crossed my mind I felt again that sudden odd little "click" in my mind that meant something had fallen into place—another vitally necessary bit of the jigsaw puzzle! The pattern, though it was still confused, was slowly becoming clearer. Why did those words ring so persistently in my brain "ground cleared"? But cleared of what? What had been dug up, or pulled down or cleared away to make those greens? Somehow I knew now that this phrase "ground cleared" had a vital connection with the secret of Patrick Flaherty.

I was sweating with excitement by now, and almost running, following the mental "scent" that always leads me in these times as the scent leads a bloodhound on the trail. I let myself go and followed my instinct blindly, going downwards towards the valley, till at last I found myself standing on the bank of the little stream, facing a scene oddly familiar.

Behind me sprawled an immense straggling thicket of prickly bush, mainly thorn and brambles. On the far side of the stream lay a cleared space of ground—evidently one of the old greens, probably the last—situated just under the curve of a high escarpment of ground that reared up sharply, like a curling wave, behind it. And the top of the wave, high above the green, was crowned with two tall trees, an oak and an ash.

The stream was about three feet wide here, and running rapidly downhill in a series of shallow cascades towards the bog that stretched far below, its gleaming pools, green rushes and snowy tufts of wild bog-cotton shining against the black patches of peat; and I reflected, as I stood staring at the green, how cleverly planned it was. It would have taken a pretty good golfer to judge his approach-shot over the stream so that it did not hit the steep face of the wall of earth on the far side of the green and bounce back into the water! But that was not important. What was important was that—I recognized the place! It was a little

altered, but still undoubtedly the place I had seen once before—in a certain drawing!

I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out the bit of paper I had been carrying. It was a sheet of scribbled drawings torn from the sketch-book I had found in Patrick's room. I had known those drawings would ultimately lead me somewhere—and I had been right! It was the sheet on which were the three drawings that had so arrested my attention—the flying figures with the Gaelic phrase beneath them, "*Nai aluinn an sluagh Sidhe*"¹ . . . the face with the foxy, unpleasant eyes, and a small landscape sketch. A sketch of the piece of ground at which I was now looking.

Yes, it was unmistakable! There was the sharply-rising escarpment, curling forward over the top like a breaking wave, the twin trees that crowned it, and in the foreground the fast-running stream falling in shallow cascades. But below the escarpment, where lay the present green . . . ah, there was the difference! In the drawing there was shown a mass of thorny bushes, almost filling the space between the curling bank and the stream, where now there stretched a flat piece of ground covered with rough grass. Evidently the thorny thicket against which I was standing had originally stretched right across the stream—probably forming a tangled arch of green over the water—but on the further side the bushes had been grubbed up one and all, in order to clear the ground for the final green. An ideal green, challenging the best golfer to rise in his highest efforts—but what if the making of it had challenged Something or Somebody else, who had met the challenge in his own way, and won? I re-read that line in Gaelic that was written below the boy's sketch of the scene, and it seemed to read now with a faintly sinister emphasis . . . "*Dail-sheomra ruit Sidhe*."²

I put the slip of paper in my pocket, splashed through the stream—I was so wet already that it made little difference—and walked around the green, surveying it inch by inch. Here and there, growing along the bank of the stream or clinging determinedly along the base of the earthwall on the further side, I found a few stunted remnants of the bushes that had once covered the clearing, and examined them. Yes! They were thorn-bushes, as I had suspected—or rather, they had once been thorn-

¹ "How beautiful are the Shée."

² "The Council Room of the Shée."

bushes. And the two trees that soared into the blue above the escarpment were—an Oak and an Ash! The Fairy Trinity—my training and my instinct alike, aided by a few lucky pointers, had led me to the heart of the tragedy. It lay here, on this uncanny patch of ground “cleared” by a blundering fool who did not know how bitterly he was offending Those who owned it—and had owned it from time immemorial. I knew now pretty certainly what had happened, and how poor, ignorant, boastful Dick Flaherty had offended against a Folk whose very existence he would have derided. Now I only wanted a few more details, and I thought I knew where to get those. . . . As quickly as I could I made my way back to the house, lunch, and an urgent interview with Miss Cargill.

I wanted to find out whether it was possible to interview the woman who had nursed Patrick when he was a baby—and I was lucky. Miss Cargill told me that Kathleen, the pale dark young woman who had appeared with her mother, the old caretaker, to greet us on our arrival at Killeen House, had been Patrick’s nurse—and sent for her at once to come to the library.

She entered, looking, as usual, pale and rather sullen, but when she saw us both waiting, a look of half fear, half suspicion, came into her eyes, and she hesitated on the threshold, seeing no chance of escape, then came slowly forward.

I felt it was no time to beat about the bush, so I spoke quite frankly.

“Kathleen, I want to have a little talk to you about Master Patrick.”

She whitened and looked away, evidently frightened. After a moment she spoke guardedly.

“I . . .” She swallowed sharply. “It’s not talkin’ about Master Patrick I’d want to be, sor.”

Her soft brogue was very appealing, her eyes large and scared as a captured bird’s, but there was no time to be soft-hearted.

“I’m afraid I shall *have* to ask you a few questions, though you needn’t be frightened,” I said. “But you know as well as we do that Master Patrick . . . well, he isn’t . . . *himself*.”

I chose the words deliberately, and I saw her blench and shiver like a frightened horse. She glanced behind her and, seeing Miss Cargill standing near the door, hesitated—then, abandoning the idea of a hasty flight, took refuge in silence. Her eyes were fixed on the ground as I went quietly on—there would be nothing

gained, I knew, by trying to frighten the girl. Our one hope was to "gentle" her as one gentles a frightened horse—to appeal to the soft heart that lies so close to the surface in the Irish race.

"Don't think that anybody is going to be angry with you, or reproach you, or anything like that," I said. "I am here to try and cure Master Patrick—to bring him back to himself, shall we say. . . ."

She threw me a quick, scared glance.

"Ye won't do that, sor," she muttered. "Them that . . . them that took him knows how to hold fast."

My heart was beginning to thump with excitement. I was on the right track—I knew it, at last! If I could only persuade the girl to tell us all she knew. . . . Miss Cargill spoke, and her voice held an appealing note, surprising from one of usually rather bluntly-direct speech.

"Kathleen, help us—*do* help us, if you can? You know what a darling baby Master Patrick was—once. You know how much you loved him! You know how terrible it was when he changed—when he became like this. Don't you want to help us to find a cure, if there *is* one? Kathleen, *please*, for the sake of the little baby you used to love, tell us all you know."

The girl's face, which had been working oddly as the older woman spoke, suddenly broke into the piteous grimace of tears, and she hid her face in her hands.

"Och, I'll tell, I'll tell!" she sobbed. "And mebbe it'll bring the peace to me sowl at last that it hasn't known for years an' years. I'll tell—and be able to face the praste again widout blushin' at the black shame of the thing I've been hidin' all these years. . . ."

She broke down and wept violently, and it took Miss Cargill several minutes to soothe her into a condition sufficiently tranquil to recount the story that she obviously had to tell us. And a sad story and a mysterious one it was. . . .

It appeared that a few months after the completion of the golf-course Dick Flaherty had to go to Dublin on business connected with the estate, and his wife went with him, to do some necessary shopping for herself and her baby boy. She had been reluctant to leave Patrick, but Dick had pointed out that a very young child would be a great nuisance in an hotel; moreover, that they would both get through their business more quickly if they were not hampered; and finally, that to take him with them would imply lack of trust in Kathleen and her mother—then the cook-housekeeper—which would greatly upset them. So, fortified by

her husband's assurances, Mrs. Flaherty departed with her spouse to Dublin. . . .

But the day after they left Mrs. O'Halloran fell ill with an attack of rheumatism, and the entire charge of the child devolved upon Kathleen, who adored little Patrick and fully intended to carry out her charge with faithfulness. But youth and heedlessness, and that ancient mantrap, love, combined to thwart her good intentions. . . .

She was in the habit of taking Patrick out for a short walk about five o'clock in the afternoon, for a final breath of air before his supper and bed. And on leaving the house, was tempted, by seeing a red-capped figure moving about on the bog down in the valley, to go down across the golf-course towards it—though actually she had been forbidden by her mother even to set foot on the course, as apart from its being hard walking for a child, it was considered "dangerous ground" at all times, and doubly dangerous now, since the venturesome Englishman had aroused the enmity of Those whose exclusive property it had been as long as local memory could recollect! But the red cap in the valley below happened to be on the head of tall Danny Rea, cutting peats for market on the bog; he was the handsomest lad in the village and the girls all mad for him, and the chance of meeting him alone was more than Kathleen, ardent, romantic and only nineteen, could bear to lose.

So down the slope of the parklands and across the golf-course she went, carrying little Patrick pick-a-back when the ground became too rough for his little legs to struggle along, and hailed her Danny—and he, only too willing to leave work for an hour's dalliance with a pretty girl, left his peats and his spade, and together they wandered away, leaving the little boy, weary with his long walk, sleeping on the newly-cleared green, wrapped in Kathleen's coat, in the shadow of the curving escarpment.

"I tied me coat-belt round him and it to a root, dear knows," sobbed Kathleen, "so that he shouldn't roll loose in his sleep and into the water, the darlint, nor go wandering away if he woke up! I thought he'd be as safe as if he was tied up in his play-pen and I thought it was only a little while I'd be away, kissing that Danny—bad cess to him, for it was no more to him than a good meal, and to me it was everything, because I'd gone wi' no man till then—in the tumbledown old ancient hut that was down there on the edge of the bog. Glory be to God, I was a silly girl lost in love, and everything went clean out o' my head so that I forgot the

time and my duty and everything except that Danny, the spalpeen, and his wicked kisses . . . and when I came out at last it was dark, and the stars laughing down at me, and I broke away from Danny, and with my heart in my mouth went running off up the hill to the bushes under the cliff where I'd left my baby! And when I saw him lying, still in the same place, I drew me breath free, and when I stooped over him, and he still seemed sleeping, I thanked the saints and lifted him into my arms, and made up the hill as quick as I could to the house, where I found my mother waiting for me half-mad, the creature, pacing up and down! She took one look at the baby and gave a cry like a soul in torment, for it opened its eyes and looked at her . . . and then, Mother of Mercies, it looked at me. . . ." She shivered and closed her eyes a moment. "And I looked at the clock and saw it was after twelve o'clock and I knew I'd left the blessed child out there in Their power while I dallied with Danny, God help me, hours and hours without realizing it . . . and while I was away, They had taken their chance!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Miss Cargill.

Kathleen looked at her and then at me.

"Mother of God!" she whispered. "Is't possible ye don't know, mam, even now?"

I nodded.

"I know, Kathleen. I'll explain to Miss Cargill. I know now, thanks to you, what to do. You have more than atoned for your fault, because you have told me what I needed to make sure my diagnosis is right. So go, and don't worry about it any more. I think and believe—all will be well!"

As the door closed behind her, Miss Cargill looked at me in blank bewilderment.

"Tell me," she demanded. "You mean you really know what happened while she left the child?"

"I do," I said. "I've suspected it, to be honest, for some time—I guessed it shortly after I came here. But I wanted confirmation, and details of how it all happened. Patrick is a changeling, Miss Cargill."

Her face whitened.

"A *changeling*!" she breathed. "But . . . *do* such things happen? I've read about them when I was a child, as one reads about magic wands and fairy rings and spells and enchanted castles, and all the rest. But to think that it could really happen. . . ."

"If we didn't pooh-pooh what we learn as children in the form of fable and fairy-tale we should be a great deal wiser," I said brusquely. "And I could tell you a lot about all the things you mention that would change your views about their being merely fairy 'tales'! But that can keep. Here in your hands is the solid proof that a changeling is, or can be, a horrible reality! Patrick is not Patrick at all, but a fairy child—and from some none too kind and pleasant branch of the fairy family too, from the way he behaves! Obviously Dick Flaherty incurred the wrath of some of the Folk by making this golf-course on what they regarded as ground peculiarly their own. . . . If I had the chance of digging up the ancient history connected with Killeen House and the hill it stands on, I've no doubt I should find that it had been known as the 'Fairy Hill', or something of the sort, for untold ages past!"

"It was," said Miss Cargill, and I hurried on.

"And actually it seems that that particular plot of ground that he cleared, for the last green, was a special meeting-place of the Folk."

"I know," said Miss Cargill unexpectedly, "that several of the greens had names—the last green was called the Council Green. I always wondered why."

"Well, now you know," I said. "In Gaelic '*Dail-sheomra ruit Sidhe*' is 'The Council Room of the Shee'! Well, evidently this roused the wrath of the Shee to boiling-point, and they wreaked revenge on the despoiler of their land via his child when this silly girl gave them the opportunity by leaving him unguarded on the very heart of their quarrel—the Council Green itself! They carried him away, and substituted one of their own weird offspring who resembles him in nothing but physical appearance. And when not even *that* drove Dick Flaherty and his wife away . . . well, you know what happened to Dick! I've no the least doubt that the Folk caused that skid—somehow. Sounds pretty beastly, but from their point of view they had good reason to hate him." I showed her the thorny twig. "That's thorn—the fairy bush. Without knowing what he was doing, that fool of a brother-in-law of yours first invades their territory, then chooses the most sacred spot on the whole hillside—their Council Room—for his last green, and to make things a thousand times worse, clears it by grubbing up their sacred bush—the Magic Thorn—growing on the brink of running water too, and with an Oak and an Ash standing above on the escarpment! D'you see?"

The Shee, outraged, their sacred symbols violated, their most precious ground ruined and destroyed, took their revenge—and it remains to be seen whether I have the power or the knowledge enough to force them to release their prisoner and bring him back to us.”

“Shall I tell Agnes?” said Miss Cargill.

I shook my head.

“No—please. We *may* fail—in which case she would only suffer the most terrible disappointment, after having her hopes raised. Also, she will want to know—perhaps to take part in—the cure. And you know . . .” I looked straight at the grey-haired woman before me. “The cure is no easy one, Miss Cargill! It’s a grim ordeal, and takes some nerve to carry through, and we couldn’t depend on Mrs. Flaherty. It is no job for a mother to share in—it would not be fair to ask her. But I shall need helpers—two if I can get them. I believe I can depend on Hammond—he will do anything to help your sister. Can I depend on *you*—no matter what happens? Remember that if you weaken, or cry out, or funk or disobey my orders, that this one chance of driving out the Changeling, this Child of the Shee, that now wears his body and speaks with his lips, and bringing back the boy Patrick into possession of his own body will be lost—and we can never try again. He will be prisoned eternally with the Folk, and this creature will remain here—with us. Can you do it?”

She looked at me, and her lips set in a firm line.

“I can!” she said. “Only tell me what to do. . . .”

To diagnose a disease is the first step towards finding a cure. And luckily, since I had suspected for some time what the disease really was, I had studied its cure—the only sure cure, according to the ancient books I had borrowed from the great library; a cure at least proved and trusted for many hundreds of years past, when this strange happening was more frequently known. But the cure, as I had warned Miss Cargill, was a grim one, and courage would be needed to carry it out . . . and there was no time to spare! Hallowe’en was upon us, when the borderline between the two worlds grows so slender that one may step across it more easily than at any other time of the year—and this was the time on which I wanted to seize.

I realized the difficulty of the task that lay before me! Not willingly would Patrick—or rather, this strange being that had

dispossessed Patrick of his flesh—join with me in the ritual that was to divorce him from his place amongst the human race and send him back where he belonged! Not that he was—or could be—either happy or at ease with us. But it was plain that he had been “sent” into the human race in order to wreak vengeance on it as far as possible—to create fear and pain and distress as far round him as he could reach. And he would not only fight to retain his footing in the enemy territory he had entered, but his Folk would fight to keep him there—now I understood his reluctance to contact the vibrations of his own land! He knew that once in contact with those vibrations, once he felt their irresistible “pull”, his link with the human race *must* become ever so little weakened as his blood called to those who shared that blood—that strange lucent ichor that fills the veins of Those who are neither of Earth nor Heaven, but somewhere in between. . . .

I knew that urge, that call of blood to blood would be a factor on our side that I could use—but still, it would be hard. Force might have to be tried—though I devoutly hoped not. Pain and fear are not weapons that those who tread my path like to handle. But there might be nothing else for it. . . .

I explained the situation to Hammond as best I could, hoping that I could manage to make it sound convincing—though in the light of day it certainly sounded, even to me, like some crazy dream! But to my relief and surprise Hammond not only agreed at once to help me, but showed little surprise at my story.

I know now, of course, that he had not told me one-half of the queer or uncanny experiences he had been through with the boy, for fear of being laughed at or disbelieved—but I was thankful for his response, and set about making my preparations, for Hallowe'en was due within the coming week, and coincided with a full moon—which again would be a help. The only thing that remained was to wait—and hope that Patrick would not try on anything particularly devilish during the time of waiting.

I had planned every move of the night's work with the greatest care, but nevertheless we were all three pretty well keyed-up when at last the fateful evening arrived!

I had arranged with Miss Cargill that a sleeping draught should be slipped into the cup of cocoa that Patrick always drank the last thing before going to bed, and to my relief it worked like a charm. Within a few minutes after swallowing it he was nodding and his mother packed him off to bed with a lecture about over

doing things—which would have made me smile had I not been so anxious and strung-up!

Shortly afterwards the good lady also took her departure upstairs with her sister, who sent me a glance of understanding as the door closed behind them. I sat in the little “drawing-room” waiting and listening and trying to read, and half an hour later a cautious tap came at the door, and there entered Hammond, warmly clad in a sweater and corduroy trousers, with his feet thrust into soft rubber “sneakers”, carrying a length of fine strawberry netting over one arm. We shook hands and conversed in whispers until a cautious knock on the ceiling told us that Miss Cargill, who slept overhead, was likewise ready, and her sister safely asleep—and leaving the door and window ajar and one light burning, we went softly out of the room and up the stairs to Patrick’s bedroom. We passed the door of Miss Cargill’s room, and she stepped softly out and joined us, wrapped in a thick coat and scarf, with goloshes muffling the sound of her shoes on the polished floor.

I don’t mind admitting that my heart was in my mouth as softly I turned the handle of the door. I had done my best to make the boy’s sleep sure, not only by the use of a drug, but by mental “willing”—I had spent the half-hour I had sat waiting in the drawing-room for Hammond and Miss Cargill on building about Patrick a “shell” of sleep that should endure until I myself removed it. But I was younger then at this business than I am now, and less sure of my own powers . . . also I had not before contacted these strange Folk, and I did not know their powers and how far they might be able to counteract my own. Further, to-night was All Hallow’s Eve, which gave them added strength, and the boy himself, of course, being *of* them, was allied with them, and so probably, either consciously or unconsciously, on the alert against me. It might well be that he was already awake and aware of our approach, and if he made an outcry or a struggle, that would awaken Mrs. Flaherty and ruin the whole scheme! I knew that her soft-heartedness would never permit the body of her child, no matter who or what inhabited it, to go through the ordeal that lay ahead . . . not even to regain his freedom. But all was well.

Patrick was sleeping soundly when I went in, and it was only a matter of a few moments for me then to make the usual passes over him and send him into a profound hypnotic trance, from which I forbade him to wake until I gave him permission. He

lay inert, breathing steadily as Miss Cargill and I drew a thick dressing-gown over his pyjamas, put slippers on his feet and wrapped a heavy blanket over all—then I called Hammond in with his strawberry net, which he had fashioned into a sort of small hammock that swung, rucksack fashion, on his back from two strong webbing straps slung across his chest and shoulders. Patrick was a solid, well-grown youngster, and to carry him like a baby in one's arms a couple of miles over rough grounds, streams, bushes, ditches and the rest, would have been more than either Hammond or I could have done . . . whereas when Miss Cargill and I lifted Patrick into the "cradle", he settled to sleep quite comfortably, encased in the netting, against Hammond's broad back.

I paused on our way downstairs to pick up a certain bundle from my room, and together we went down and out of the front door, which Hammond had carefully left unfastened, into the night and our grim task. It was an eerie-looking scene that spread before us as we went across the drive—an eerie scene, painted in the icy whiteness and dead black of midnight! The moonlight was brilliant, and the trees and their shadows lay like pools of ink on the shimmering whiteness, like hoar-frost, of the dew-wet grass, across which our going left a passage like a dark smeared path. The little pools and the tumbling cascades of the stream glittered uncannily, and the stars overhead in the dark blue sky seemed as large as the tinsel rosettes on a Christmas-tree, with the moon in the middle like a big white face staring down at us; and as we went, I swear Things gathered about us till the whole mountain-side was alive and palpitant with unseen Folk, all alert and stirring, watching us, suspicious, wondering. . . .

We made the best speed we could, but the boy was heavy and the going none too good, and again I had the horrible feeling that endeavours were being made to hinder our advance . . . yet though Miss Cargill lost her footing twice, once in a rabbit hole, where she almost sprained her ankle, and again when a stone slipped beneath her foot, and I scraped myself cruelly with an unseen strand of barbed wire, Hammond—perhaps because he was bearing Their child—escaped any accident, and at last we crossed the stream and stood below the high-curving bank upon the so-sadly-denuded Council Ground.

Hammond, unslinging his burden, laid it carefully on the ground, and Miss Cargill dropped on her knees and examined the

sleeping child carefully. He still slept peacefully and she choked on a little sob as she said in a low voice, "Go on—let's get it over quickly!" and I nodded.

Hammond and I were already busy building a fire—but we were not finding things easy. I had brought down in my bundle charcoal, petrol-soaked rags, bits of paper and wood to make a fire, and for several minutes we strove to build one, but without effect—the things seemed to slide away from beneath our hands, the matches went out, the sticks would not catch fire, and at last I realized that I should have to make a magic Circle all round us, or the fire could not be built. The Folk had taken alarm—and they were bent on thwarting us. . . .

I glanced at Miss Cargill and saw that she looked queer, white and rather tense. She was staring steadily across the stream towards where, on the far side of the water, the great dark thicket of thorn sprawled its length down the mountain-side towards where the bog gleamed lividly in the moonlight. I followed her eyes, and it seemed as though against the darkness of the thicket vague wreath-like shapes were forming . . . it might have been my excited fancy, or it might not, but in any case the quicker I "fenced" us all in the better, if the Forces of that strange land were already taking shape!

Now there are several methods of forming that magical Circle within which is safety. The best-known, of course, is that drawn within the Pentacle, the Double Triangle that forms a Star, drawn in chalk, with lighted candles at the Points, and little cups of Holy Water standing within the "valleys", or the hollows of the Points. But there are many occasions when it is not feasible to use this Circle—as now. What could one do on wet grass, on a windswept hillside, with chalk and lighted candles? There is the Electric Pentacle, one of the finest and most reliable forms of protection against the forces of the Outer Dark. But again, for obvious reasons, this would have been useless in our present situation, and I had to fall back, not for the first time by many, on that lesser-known protection called the "Holy Rope" or the "Blessed Girdle"—I've heard it called by both names.

Now this is no easy thing to obtain! It must be made by an ordained priest, in the correct way at the correct time—and nowadays there are few priests who know how to make it, and fewer still who *will* make it, even when they know. But I had done a service to a certain priest two years ago, and in reward he had consented to make one for me—and I never travelled

without it, especially when engaged on a case. It is a length of new rope, made of twelve strands to represent the Disciples; this is first soaked in Holy Water, then knotted in threefold knots (to represent the Trinity) in seven places, to represent the Holy Number, and then it is left for a night under the High Altar while Mass is said above it. This length of rope, laid in a circle on the ground and held in place either by weights made from lead taken from a church roof, or with split pegs cut from holy wood (meaning wood cut from any tree growing in a churchyard), will keep any force of evil at bay, and it was with a sense of considerable relief that I drew it out of my pocket and pegged it securely down round the four of us and the fire we were trying to make.

Its effect was immediate. Within three minutes the fire we had been unable to light was roaring up fiercely, casting a weird scarlet glow upon the tangled bushes about us, the dew-wet grass and the bubbling stream a few feet away. And we turned to the part of the business we liked least. . . .

The boy was still sleeping, and as though to melt my heart he looked, as he lay there in the leaping firelight, as handsome and as innocent as a child could ever hope to look. His tousled fair hair curled in a crest over his smooth brow, his ruddy young face was flushed with sleep, and the young lips I had so often seen curled in ugly derision or twisted in mockery were pouted now in as innocent a half-smile as ever sculptured cherub bore.

I glanced at Hammond, bending close at my shoulder, and Miss Cargill at my side.

"You're going to go through with it, both of you—for the child's sake?" I asked. "I told you what would have to be done, and if you weaken, you know, I warned you . . . I don't know what may not happen to all of us."

Both met my glance sturdily.

"I'll stand fast," said Miss Cargill briefly. "But let's get on—quickly!"

"You said it, miss," said Hammond. "Go on, sir, we're behind you. The sooner it's over the better."

Together we dragged the still insensible boy into such a position that he lay with his feet towards the fire, and then, with my heart pounding and a nasty sick feeling at my throat, I loosened the blanket about his legs and removed his slippers.

Hammond knelt at his head, holding each arm down, so that he could not move, even if in struggling he wriggled out of the blanket that still swathed him like a giant cocoon, and I beckoned Miss Cargill to kneel opposite me so that she gripped one ankle while I gripped the other. Then I made the passes that released the boy from trance, but—to my great relief—he remained for the moment in a natural sleep. I looked up at last across the stream towards where, I knew, *They* were gathered watching us, and spoke, hoping my voice sounded stronger and more determined than it felt.

“People of the Hills, I know you are there—and I know that this is your child, born of you, of your own green blood and race, thrust by you, out of revenge, into the human family to wreak mischief and distress because of a wrong done to you! Now I come to promise you that that wrong shall be righted—if you in your turn will right the wrong you have done to this human child whose body, inhabited by your Own, lies at my mercy here.”

I paused. No answer! And yet, *was* there no answer? The air seemed full of far-off rushing and whispering noises—of constant movement and murmur, yet there was nothing definite enough to call actual *sound*. It was as though one heard from an immense distance off, a mighty multitude rustling and muttering agitatedly, excitedly, together. Yet there was nothing to be seen but the moonlit hillside, the black trees and their shadows, and the sprawling length of undergrowth on the further side of the stream, like a long dark cloud against which still that strange effect of swirling vapour persisted, as though steam was rising from some hidden kettle, faint yet just visible in a stir of barely-perceptible movement against the dusk of the tangled bushes. I waited a moment longer and then drew a long breath and spoke again.

“You do not answer me—so I must act! This child of yours has done grievous harm—and so now I punish him, and you in him, in this physical body he has stolen.”

I steeled my heart, snatched a burning brand from the fire and laid it to the soles of Patrick's feet—and as I did so it seemed that all hell broke loose about me! The wild shriek of the boy as the agony aroused him rose high, cutting the air like a steel spear-head of anguished sound, and at the same moment a furious wind sprang up and swept swirling about us, and the flames and smoke of the fire bent and flattened out, sweeping towards us so

that Miss Cargill drew back, ducking her head in fright—but she did not let go her hold of the boy and the flames flared high again as the Holy Rope threw back the Forces that were trying to smite us within it. As if in baffled fury the wind roared and buffeted wildly around the Circle, bringing with it, it seemed, a faint crying echo of a million voices.

It was again, as though one heard the clamour of a furious mob a thousand miles away and yet close at hand, the strangest thing—and easily the most horribly uncanny!—I had ever known. And through and over it soared the cries of the boy Patrick in his agony, and I smelt that horrible smell, the stench of singed live flesh. . . .

I cried out too, in my own horror at the thing I had to do, and even as I cried out the wind dropped and the sound with it, leaving utter silence, broken only by the sobbing of the boy as he writhed in the strong grip of the three of us—and as I looked across the stream I knew that I had won the first round of this strange battle. From out of the dim swirling vapours that had curled and wreathed themselves against the thicket, a Shape was slowly emerging—a shape strangely fluid, uncertain, changing as a shadow thrown on running water changes. Indeed, the simile is the best I know; the figure looked like the reflection of something seen on a gliding stream, ever shifting and changing—altering slightly, as ripples from a thrown stone or branch will alter it, yet in its general outlines remaining always the same. . . .

The impression I got was that of a tall, male figure, incredibly lean and clad in some skin-fitting garments of, I thought, darkest green—though precisely what they were like it was impossible in the darkness to discern.

But the face! I had no difficulty in recognizing that face—I had already seen it, drawn in Patrick's sketch-book! "*An Ciar*"—the Dark One. . . . A narrow, fox-like face like a pallid mask lit by a pair of eyes colourless as the grey pools in the bog, with a thin mouth, long and cruel and beautiful, that curved above the sharply-pointed chin, and above the face wreathed wild strands of dark red hair, the colour of dried blood. . . .

The silence was almost uncanny after that hurricane of wind, and I knew that a myriad unseen eyes watched me as I faced that sinister Shape, saw it ripple and shift and quiver against the dark background of the bushes, fade and grow strong again, as always I held my brand firmly over the boy's shuddering feet.

Vaguely as I spoke I heard Miss Cargill's voice behind me muttering prayers, and I knew that Hammond's face, like mine, was running with sweat. . . .

"*Taoiseach na muintir na cruta*,¹ I greet you! You know this child?"

I don't know how I can tell you that I received an answer, because I do not think that, with my *physical* ears, I heard any actual voice. Nor did the others hear any reply—and afterwards Miss Cargill told me how queer and awesome it was to hear me speak into the voice of the night, listen as though to a reply, and speak again. But my inner senses heard the answer clearly enough, given in a clear, thin, distant voice that raised a horrid sense of gooseflesh down my spine, so utterly inhuman was it. It spoke the ancient tongue of Eire—the tongue that was sung and spoken many a thousand years before England and the English were even dreamt about.

"*Seadh aithnighim an leanbh so!*"²

As the voice spoke, in a flash Patrick stopped his moaning and writhed and stiffened into attention. So he heard it, too? No wonder, if my theory was right—and now I was excitedly, triumphantly certain that it was! Blood was calling to blood . . . and even as the thought came to me the boy Patrick spoke loudly into the stillness.

"*M'athair!*"³ he said.

There was a pause, as though the world was frozen into utter stillness to listen—and then arose about us a curious sound that was at one and the same time like rushing water, like thunder, like a mighty wind and like the crying of a thousand voices in greeting, in lamentation, in fear, wonder, amaze, acclaim, and the child on the ground beside me shook from head to foot and cried out too, in a woeful voice of pain and longing mixed.

I shut my eyes and held my burning brand tightly, for we were not yet the victors in this strange battle, and I called again, above the appalling, unearthly din about me, to the Figure that I knew still stood there beyond the stream, against the thicket of the Magic Thorn.

"Who is this child?"

A pause, and then high above the clamour rose that thin voice that never belonged to humankind, faint but clear.

¹ "Chief of the Folk of the Hills."

² "Yes, I know this child."

³ "My father!"

"*Leannabh Sidhe! Leannabh Sidhe!*"¹

And the child, groaning and rolling in his pain at my feet, echoed the cry, and his voice seemed now thin and eerily inhuman like that of the other who spoke to me across the mists!

"*M'athair—m'athair e shin!*"²

The Child of the Shee—and his father! Father and son . . . father and son. Now I knew the truth, and my quest ended. I drew myself erect and cried aloud above the wild sea of calling voices that still surrounded us.

"Now you know my power and my purpose, O Chief *Taoiseach Sidhe!*"³ Take back your son and give us our own, and let there be peace between us now, for ever and a day! He who wrought you ill is dead, and the land filched from you shall be returned to you, never to be defiled again. Surely, O King, your vengeance is complete and your son, Prince of the Shee, can return to his own?"

There was a sudden silence. As though a wand had waved, all sound and movement and vibration ceased upon the hillside as though the very night held its breath in suspense, and the Shadow against the thicket flickered and wavered like a dark flame in a draught, as though it hesitated. And after a moment the strange uncanny voice came again to my ears. There was a steely note in it.

"*Aoibhinn le haois Sidhe an dioghaltas!*"⁴

"Then," I said—and I thrust the flaming brand I held deep into the heart of the fire once more as I spoke—"if you choose vengeance—then vengeance shall be *my* choice also, for the harm this child has done! This body of earth that houses your only son shall go crippled all its days from the burning brand here in my hand! The issue is clear between us, so choose! Choose!"

"Choose!" muttered Miss Cargill beside me, and it seemed that echoing all round the vast dark hillside, from every hillock and tree, every tussock of grass, every burrow and ditch and hollow, I heard voices that repeated the word again in appeal, in supplication. . . .

"*Do rogha fein fuit, a Ri! Do rogha fein fuit!*"⁵

¹ "The Child of the Shee."

² "My father—that is my father!"

³ "Lord of the Shee."

⁴ "Vengeance is dear to the Shee!"

⁵ "Yours is the choice, O Chief! Yours is the choice!"

There was another pause, and then faint but clear came the voice of the Figure that stood within the dark thicket on the further side of the stream.

*"Ni beag e! Fill oven a mhic!"*¹

There was a pause. The child at my feet, who had lain curled, moveless, in an agony of attention while this strange conversation lasted, reared himself, bound as he was, into a half-sitting position, and his voice shrilled across the dark—a voice from which the human quality had now entirely vanished, giving place to a high, sweet, almost chanting note of wonder and utter joy.

*"Ta me leat—ta me leat, m'athair!"*²

I don't quite know what actually happened then, because the whole world seemed to spin and rock round me as I flung the brand into the fire and, gathering the child up in my arms, reached out and placed him on the ground outside the circle of the Holy Rope—but I was careful not to place my foot outside the Rope. I did not trust that fox-eyed Shape with the voice of dawn winds and cold stars! Even thus, a sudden vicious gust of wind beat furiously up at me as I leant out of the Circle, Miss Cargill cried out and clutched me, and I fell back just in time as something seemed to rise and soar away from us with a sort of whistling roar . . . and lo, the child had vanished!

As I lay panting, safe within the Circle, my head was whirling, for the sound of many waters, of thunder, of the beating of wings, and of a thousand tearing, joyous winds was in my ears, and with them, mounting louder and more triumphant every minute, a chorus, high and magical and almost agonizingly sweet, of distant voices—then suddenly it seemed my eyes were opened and I saw that the whole hillside was alive with multitudes of the Shee! Swift arrowy figures sweeping up from the hillside like smoke from a burning prairie, thousands and thousands of them, great and small—and in the midst a lean, green-clad Figure with flying dark-red hair and eyes like pale water-pools bestrode a shadowy horse whose mane trailed amongst the stars and whose hooves were shod with silver! And behind that lean Figure, clinging to his waist, rode a slim boy, green-clad also, whose mop of fair hair, luminous as thistledown, streamed wildly behind him in the speed of his passing, and whose voice rose high and shrill above the others as he shouted for joy. . . .

¹ "It is enough! Return to me, my son—return!"

² "I come, I come, my father!"

Some of the Folk were horsed also, and some seemed to half-fly, half-run beside the horses, as running footmen used to do, and others were riding pillion and others still seemed to fly high and swift alone, but all followed the two green-clad shapes on the mighty horse as swarming bees follow their Queen! Some were helmed and seemed to bear sword and shield, some wore trailing robes or cloaks, some seemed clad in shining tatters, and some were naked as dawn, with wild hair flying—a vaporous flood of movement and colour, green and purple and indigo, dark as peatwater or silverwhite as moonlight, olive and brown and grey, blue and palest lilac, every colour of hill and forest, vale and river, of field and sky and sea mingled in a dazzling stream like a living rainbow. Up and away they swept, full speed, and the very air tingled with the swiftness of their passing and the vibration of their high sweet singing.

"Nac aluinn iad an mhuintir

*Righeainhail daib astreabh na cruic. . . ."*¹

And even as I saw them whirl up and away, the terrible lovely Folk, a cloud swept over the face of the moon, and all was dark—and when the cloud passed a few minutes afterwards that horde of misty flying shapes was gone. There was no sign of anything upon the quiet hillside. The Sidhe had passed, and taken their Own with them . . . and I had looked upon that sight which is granted to few men to know and live! The Ride of the Shee, the Folk of the Hills, back to their own Place. . . .

I do not quite know how long I stood there, but I knew that suddenly I realized that I was cold, that Miss Cargill was weeping softly at my feet, and that Hammond was pulling my coat.

"Look, sir," he said excitedly. "Look!"

I looked down. There, outside the Circle, where I had placed the child and whence I had seen it vanish, Patrick lay asleep, a faint smile curving his boyish mouth, one cheek pillowed on his hand! His feet were curled comfortably under him, and there were no marks of burning on them, and even as I looked he opened his eyes and blinked, puzzled, at the three of us bending over him. The glare of the fire caught his eyes first and he frowned, puzzled.

¹ "How beautiful they are,

The Lordly Ones

Who live in the Hills. . . ."

"What a jolly good blaze!" he said with appreciation. "But what for—and why are we all here?"

He sat up and held his hands out to the fire, and looked from one to the other of us, hanging almost breathlessly, had he only known it, on his words.

"Hallo, Hammond . . . have you been poaching with that net, or what? And what on earth am I doing in pyjamas out here, with my shoes off? And auntie . . ."

He looked at me in a faintly puzzled way and paused a moment—and Miss Cargill, whom I had previously prepared for this somewhat difficult moment, bent over him.

"That's Mr. Pennoyer, Patrick," she said nervously. "You've been rather ill for some time, you know, and he had been looking after you."

The boy frowned faintly and shook his head.

"I don't remember being ill," he remarked, "but I feel as though I've been away a long time somehow! I suppose that's it. Why, *auntie*!" His tone rose with affectionate amazement as he turned to Miss Cargill, and he put up a puzzled hand to touch the tears on her cheeks. "Dear old auntie—why on earth are you crying? Please don't cry. . . ."

Pennoyer paused effectively.

"Well, that's the story. Patrick accepted the situation without any apparent wonder or question after those first few moments, and went back to bed and slept as any normal boy would have done. And *was*, indeed, as normal, from that instant, as anyone in the world would be—thank goodness! The Dark One—the King of the Shee—had been as good as his word. He had taken his own and returned us—ours."

"What happened afterwards?" I asked, fascinated.

"Oh," said Pennoyer. "On my advice his mother sold the Manor House, and they all went back to live at Killeen. I knew that the Folk would welcome and help them now instead of hating and hindering, so I urged them to go, and I was perfectly right. Patrick found his feet—and an excellent school—almost at once, and the ladies soon became as popular as poor Dick Flaherty had been unpopular. Everything was all right."

"Weren't there any awkward moments—even at the start?" I asked. "After all, to bridge such a gap . . ."

"Yes, but you see to Patrick there *wasn't* a gap," said Pennoyer . . . "though, of course, there were one or two rather

difficult moments to start with! He was a trifle puzzled and astonished, I remember, on the following day when he came down to breakfast and met his mother. I had told Mrs. Flaherty the good news that her son was cured (though I omitted the details of the cure!), and though I had begged her to treat him quite ordinarily, when he appeared she burst into tears and fell on his neck, despite the careful warnings I had given her! Patrick endured the little scene politely, but was obviously much bewildered . . . however, I smoothed things over by reminding him how delicate and emotional his mother was, and he speedily forgot about it. The fact that he remembers nothing of several years of his boyhood he puts down to having been ill, and regarding the experiences he had as a guest of the Shee, in the hollow of their hills, his mind is a complete blank. . . ."

"Would he be kindly treated there?" I asked curiously.

Pennoyer smiled.

"The few who remember their visit, on their return to human life again, seem to spend their days pining for the delights of the Land of Faery!" he said. "So probably it is a good thing that the King of the Shee wiped away all memory from Patrick's mind before he let him come back!"

"Wasn't it rather a risk to let them all go back to Killeen?" I began. "Supposing the Shee . . ."

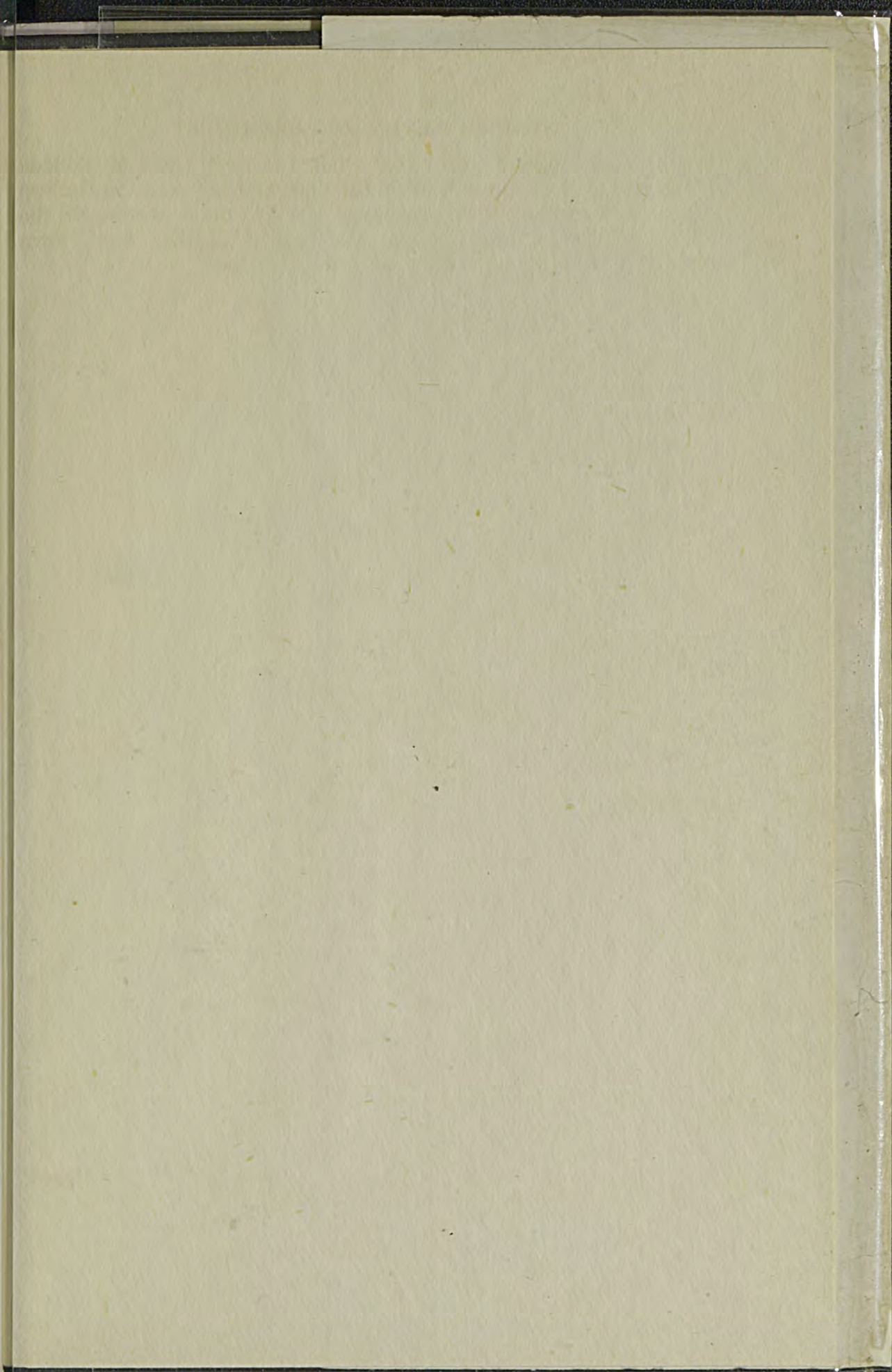
Pennoyer shook his head.

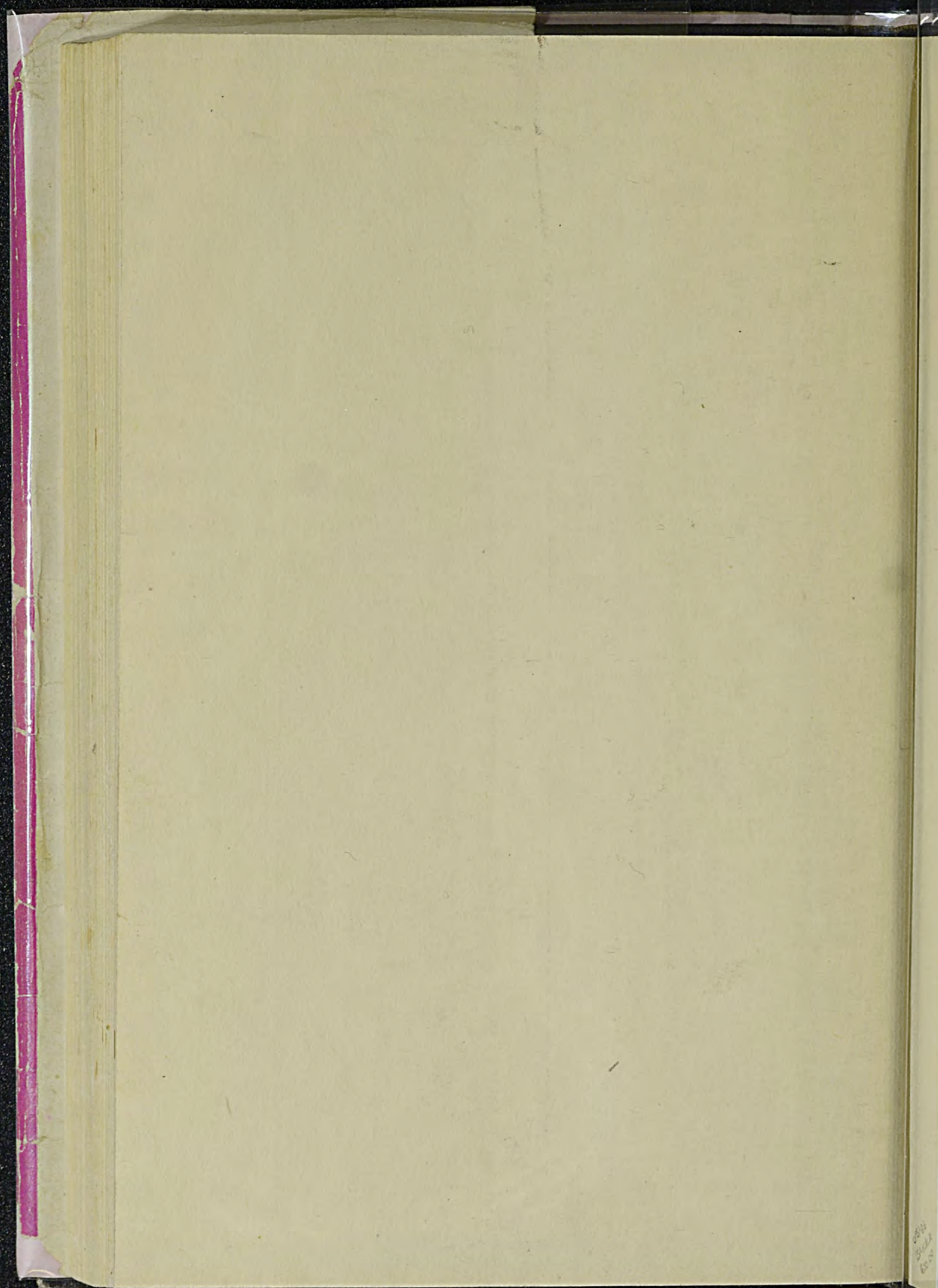
"I had made a pact with the King of the Shee," he said, "and if I kept my word I knew he would keep his. Also, I made quite certain, *before* I let the Flahertys return to Killeen, that neither they, nor any of their descendants, would ever be able to break the word I had given—that the land that had been taken from the Folk should be returned to Them. When Mrs. Flaherty asked me what I would take as a fee—she was kind enough to say that nothing would be too much—I asked her if she would make a deed of gift, to Killeen village, of the Fairy Hill, that piece of ground on which poor Dick Flaherty made his ill-fated golf-course. I asked her to arrange matters so that it might be kept in perpetuity as open ground or common-land, for the people of Killeen to wander on, to play and rest and enjoy as their own for ever. She consented at once—and the gift of the 'Fairy Hill' to the people of Killeen created such surprise and pleasure that Agnes Flaherty and her sister were promptly taken to everybody's bosom, where they have remained ever since! The Folk have their ground again, and all is well. That's some years ago

now—and I am glad to say that when I last went to visit Killeen House I saw that the two trees, the Oak and the Ash, on the top of the escarpment that overhangs the 'Council Room of the Shee', were green and strong. And best of all, the Fairy Thorn is once more growing thickly over the clearing."

"Would he be kindly treated there?" asked curiously. "The few who remember their visit on their return to the land of Fairy," he said, "do probably it is a good thing that the King of the Shee wiped away all memory from Patrick's mind before he let him come back. 'God bless it, my boy, wasn't it rather a risk to let them all go back to Killeen?' I began. 'Supposing the Shee . . . ' 'Favours the past and the future,' Pannoyr shook his head and said, 'I had made a pact with the King of the Shee,' he said, 'and if I keep my word I know he would keep his. Also I made quite certain before I let the Flashers return to Killeen that neither they nor any of their descendants would ever be able to break the word I had given—that the land that had been taken from the Folk should be returned to them. When Mrs. Flasher asked me what I would take as a fee—she was kind enough to say that nothing would be too much—I asked her if she would make a deed of gift to Killeen village of the Fairy Hill, that piece of ground on which poor Dick Flasher made his ill-fated gold mine. I asked her to arrange matters so that it might be kept in perpetuity as open ground for the people of Killeen to wander on to play and rest and enjoy as their own for ever. She consented at once—and the gift of the Fairy Hill to the people of Killeen created such surprise and pleasure that Agnes Flasher and her sister were triumphantly taken to every part of the town, where they have remained ever since! The Folk have their ground again, and all is well. That's some years ago."

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